ESTHER VANHOMRIGH

ESTHER VANHOMRIGH

BY

MARGARET L. WOODS

AUTHOR OF

"A VILLAGE TRAGEDY," ETC.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT
FEB 1 1892
34756 U

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH ST., COR. MISSION PLACE

PZ3
W865E5

Copyright, 1891,
by
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY.

All rights reserved.

08-037530

ESTHER VANHOMRIGH.

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHERE in St. James' there must still be a pleasant room with three tall windows looking over the wide street. A long time ago the middle one was the favourite resort of Ginckel Vanhomrigh, who knew a dozen pretty ways of leaning in the embrasure, or lounging on the little iron balcony which then projected from the front of the house. It was summer; there was a clearness, an indefinable cheerfulness about the sounds that floated in through the open window, which would have made even a blind man conscious that it was also morning and sunny weather. In contrast to the glow of sunshine outside, the room with its dark wainscoting and heavy curtains looked dim, except where the women's light dresses and a great flowered beau-pot of roses, fresh from some country garden, gleamed through the twilight. But St. James' Street was comparatively quiet, for the great world was out of town, though painted coaches and swift chaises rolled in from Kensington and Chiswick, and occasionally a Cabinet Minister or some other person of quality sauntered by on the shady side. This was fortunate for Ginckel, who otherwise might have been unable to disguise from himself that he lacked his due tribute of admiration that morning, the party in the parlour being too nearly related to him or too intent upon their own concerns to appreciate the graces which elsewhere made his unsubstantial fortune. Sarah Stone, indeed, looked at him pretty often, but the cheerful satisfaction which beamed from her prominent eyes was the reverse of complimentary. It said, as plainly as

her tongue said afterwards in the privacy of the sisterly bed-chamber, "I'm sure I blush to think as ever I let my fancy run on that popinjay of a cousin Vanhomrigh. O Lord! Suppose he had closed with the bargain and me missed getting my Mr. Harris!"

Mrs. Stone was exerting all the dignity appropriate to her large flabby face and figure, to repress every sign of her exultation, as she detailed to her sister-in-law Vanhomrigh the particulars of Sarah's very advantageous match. Perhaps a vague feeling of pique added to the natural solemnity of her manner, for Mrs. Vanhomrigh was almost too sincerely delighted; the least suspicion of jealousy in the background of her congratulations would have made them more flattering. But in truth Madam Van took much too sanguine a view of her own daughters and their prospects to be easily moved to jealousy, and a marriage, anybody's marriage, from the kitchen-maid's to the heir-apparent's, was to her so inexhaustibly pleasing and exciting an event, that it was too much to expect her to be annoyed at the prospect of one in her own family. As she leaned half out of her chair listening eagerly, a graceful bright-eyed woman with one delicate thin hand clasping the ends of the lace Steinkirk which served her for a cap, she kept rapidly throwing Mrs. Stone's bits of information over her right shoulder to her son, or more occasionally over her left to her daughters; not because they could not hear their aunt's deliberate utterances if so minded, but out of sheer impatience to hand on the news to somebody.

"Ginckel, my dear! Mr. Harris has the chaplaincy to the Goldsmiths' Company, and is to preach before the Lord Mayor and Corporation. Essie shall recommend him to the Doctor. Girls, girls, d'ye hear, Mr. Harris stands six feet two in his stockings! Ginckel, only fancy! Mr. Harris has a living of £500 a year, and the most commodious new built parsonage in the county.

This was irritating to Ginckel, who mistakenly supposed his parent to be reflecting on his own refusal to entertain the most distant idea of a match with

Miss Sarah. He hoped his manner of taking snuff and brushing his coat-sleeve expressed his unabated contempt for the lady, her person, fortune, and social position.

"A living of £300," corrected Mrs. Stone in her fat dull voice, "*and* expectations—an uncle just home from the Indies, and gone up to the breast in a creeping palsy."

"Oh, ma'am, you hadn't better reckon on him," put in the proud but cautious bride; "he's none so old, and may last longer than some of us; they're all such fine men in the Harris family."

"Lud, niece," cried Mrs. Vanhomrigh, "so long as you get something, what signifies if it's to-day or to-morrow? Expectations, say I, good expectations, are better any day than savings, money as you've pined and stinted yourself to lay by, and then can't get no just interest for, and very likely take out and spend for mere anger at being so treated by a pack of rascally attorneys. There's my own cousin Purvis, seventy years of age if she's a day, as upright as Sarah there, and able to do fine tambour work without her glasses; I reckoned her to be as good as an annuity saving up for my old age, and then, as I often tell the children, I'll divide all the rest of my fortune among 'em and never want anything but to see 'em happy, and my grandchildren about me."

And Mrs. Vanhomrigh ended, glancing round the circle with a triumphant smile, as one perennially unconvinced that there could exist a reasonable creature that disagreed with her. Indeed, there was a persuasiveness about her bright eyes, her quick speech with its faint reminiscence of a brogue, and above all, her unshaken confidence in the justice of her own sentiments and opinions, which lent a momentary respectability to the most outrageous ones she might be pleased to express.

Mrs. Stone, however, was not one to be surprised into the most trifling deviation from the straight line. "I am not of your mind, sister," she replied stiffly. "As a clergyman, I am sure Mr. Stone could not approve of such principles. But, as I was saying, what

with Mr. Harris' cure and Sarah's own little fortin—for my girls won't go penniless to no man,—she'll have enough and to spare for a young woman that has been plainly brought up and not set above herself by book-learning and company that's too fine for her."

At this home-thrust Molly Vanhomrigh raised her eyes from her own pretty foot, which she had been pointing and balancing some inches from the ground, either for the pleasure of looking at it, or as an accompaniment to certain idle dreams. She glanced up with a mischievous smile at her sister, at whom her aunt no doubt more particularly aimed. At the mention of the too well known name of cousin Purvis the least trace of a perpendicular line had shown itself on Essie's white brow, but it was gone, and she not only seemed, but was, totally unconscious that Mrs. Stone had spoken with any special intention. Nor did it occur to her as she stood with her hands clasped behind her and her head a little thrown back, that an attitude to her so natural that it was becoming, was unusual in a young lady, and therefore laid her open to her aunt's severe animadversions and her cousins' small pleasantries. Esther Vanhomrigh was a straight, tall young woman, in figure rather robust than what is generally termed graceful ; but in that very robustness there was grace of a kind—something that gave pleasure to an unvitiated eye—and her skin was white, softer in tone but not less pure than her white gown. Her cousins observed her to be dressed with a studied simplicity this morning, and whereas she had been used to wear her hair dressed in curls, it was now brushed up under a plain cap. Its rough crisp waves, rebellious to the straightening brush, were of a light golden brown. The dark eyebrows and deepset grey eyes, which she owed to her mother, and the broad forehead above them, gave an undeniable impressiveness to her face. As to its beauty there were different opinions.

The fragile Francis Earle, leaning against the mantel-piece with a book in one hand, looked at her over the top of it with an inscrutable expression ; admira-

tion, discontent, mockery—it might have been construed to mean all or any, but its most obvious meaning was mockery.

"Montaigne again!" he said. "Since last I played with this book—the Lord preserve me from reading it!—since then, I say, you have vented nine separate attacks of the spleen on these venerable pages. The nine reasons for 'em, Miss Essie, or the one reason for the nine?"

"Put it as you please," replied she carelessly.

"Perhaps they stand for the nine most intolerable times old Ann has pulled my hair while she was dressing it; and you know we durst not complain—oh, we durst not for our lives! Only I like to keep some sage at my dressing-table to take my scratches and lend me his philosophy."

"Sage? Sage?" questioned Francis. "Is his name Montaigne when in the flesh? Philosophy? That is a long word, and what it means in a lady's mouth I cannot possibly guess."

"Not so much nonsense as in a gentleman's, you must agree," retorted she, "since we cannot mean Aristotle and all that, of which we know nothing, and which you tell me is by far the greatest nonsense in the world."

"Alas! how should I love the nymph Philosophy whom I have not seen, when I do not love the philosophers whom I have seen? But you, Miss Essie, I believe you love 'em. Tell me now, do you not love a philosopher above everything?"

It was impossible to say if Esther was deliberately ignoring certain personal meanings in her interlocutor's remarks, or whether she really had not observed them.

"I cannot answer your question. I do not know any philosopher as yet," she answered; "but when I am presented to Mr. Berkeley I will tell you—no, I certainly will not tell you, if I love him."

The young man dropped Montaigne beside the roses so sharply that the little Dutch table and the china pot rattled again.

"Pooh!" he said; "you need not. If you do not

love him, you will at any rate love to be acquainted with him. There never was a less artless dissembler than you, miss, and we all know your ruling passions sooner than yourself. To walk up the Mall with Doctor Swift, and down it with Mr. Pope; in one round of the Ring to capture a compliment from Mr. Gay, a *Howdee* from Mr. Prior, and a bow from Mr. Addison; this, my dear Hess, is your ambition. Faith! 'tis an odd one."

"I own 'tis uncommon," she answered, sticking out a little more a chin that was too heavy for beauty; "but Prince Posterity is on my side. Is he not proud to be acquainted with Homer and Horace, and mighty little concerned to know the fat lords that fed them?"

"Fie! the comparison is as upside down as your face in a spoon. His Highness loves wit disencumbered of the wits: while you—Well! well! I own there is one thing you love better than to be acquainted with a wit."

"I cannot guess what that is, Master Francis."

"To acquaint us with the fact that you know them. Mr. Spectator commends our taste, Mr. Tatler our coffee. A post! a post! These with speed to all whom it does not concern! Why, such news must be spread even so far as Oxford, to so obscure a personage as Francis Earle, esquire—scholar, I mean."

If the young man's object was to annoy, he had at length succeeded. Esther coloured as she seated herself on the sofa at a little distance from him.

"O thou censorious brat!" she cried. "But be satisfied. Never again shalt thou be plagued with news, with a fine ruffle, a shirt, a bottle of sweet waters, or anything else that is good from thy kind cousins. Though there are gentlemen, mind you, and fine gentlemen too, that would be pleased enough to get 'em."

He followed, and dropped down between her and Molly, laughing silently.

"Mercy! mercy! How angry you are because I tear the mask from your female vanity! Yet 'tis not

for diversion I do't. No! but all on poor Molly's account, because you grow arrogant and despise her. There, don't deny it, Moll, for she does despise you. What reason can she have to wear a plain cap and love philosophers, except to set herself above the misses who wear pretty shoes and love lords?"

It was Molly's turn to redden and bite her fan. It was true that she had a little of her mother's childish delight in fine company, but even of that she was ashamed before her more austere sister, and she feared Francis had some more particular meaning.

"I have not wit nor Essie malice enough to rally with you, sir," she said; "so pray take it we have hauled down our colours, and cease firing."

"Not wit, miss? Demme, not wit?" cried fat young Edward Stone, starting from an open-eyed doze, edging his chair nearer, and settling a cravat which required as much attention as some modern shirt-cuffs. "Gad, though! you've a very pretty wit. Quite enough wit for a lady, say I."

"Why, cousin, how can you tell 'tis always enough?" asked Esther, with a smile, turning on her cousin that direct look of hers, which the beaux were apt to feel vaguely uncomplimentary, since it betrayed no consciousness that their approval was of importance to her. "Enough wit for a lady, means, I suppose, enough to exercise a gentleman's wit and not enough to match it."

"Just so, miss," returned Mr. Stone, pleased to find himself conversing, for this happened to him very rarely. "Oddso! you take my meaning precisely."

"Oh, cousin!" cried Molly, pouting, "how can you say that, when you know 'twas a compliment you meant me, and no meaning else in it whatever? Sure I'll never forgive you if you let sister go explaining away your pretty speeches to me. Indeed, sir, you shall swear you meant nothing in the world but a compliment to me."

That two young ladies on their promotion might be laughing at a solid and rising young gentleman from the City was an idea too preposterous to occur

to a well-regulated mind, so Edward Stone replied by slowly involving himself in manifold excuses and protestations, staring all the time with dull but growing admiration into Cousin Molly's pretty face. It was pleasant to look at it, and pleasant too to show his mother and sisters his masculine independence of their feminine likes and dislikes by openly admiring a Vanhomrigh girl. As to Miss Molly, being undeniably both a coquette and a tease, it amused her equally to captivate her cousin and to scandalize her aunt.

Meanwhile Ginckel had hurriedly left the room and flown to the street door, to intercept a young man in riding-boots, who came lounging past. Presently the boots were heard on the stairs. Ginckel announced "My Lord Mordaunt," and a youth, remarkably tall and also remarkably handsome, entered the room. There was an indifference that amounted to impertinence in the expression of his pale face with the heavy-lidded eyes, as he performed his bow at the door, and after a pause, apparently of doubt whether or not to exert himself so far, extended a limp hand. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had risen as he came in, and, breaking through her conversation as though her sister-in-law had suddenly ceased to exist, darted towards him, joy beaming from her bright eyes. Had she not already, in day and night dreams, embraced him as her son-in-law, and saluted her Molly as Lady Mordaunt? Her delight in the prospect was frank, but by no means grovelling; for there was no match her girls could achieve fine enough to surprise her, and she was fully as pleased to think Molly would make half of a very pretty couple, as that she would have a coronet on her coach, and eventually the finest pearls in the peerage. For Lord Mordaunt was heir to the Earldom of Peterborough. If the marriage was projected in Ginckel's head, planned down to the wedding-favours in his mother's and tremblingly dreamed of in little Molly's, there was no reason to suppose the idea of it had found any place whatever in the young man's. He was but twenty, and by no means of an ardent dis-

position. As he seated himself at Molly's side totally ignoring his hostess and every one else in the parlour, he smiled languidly as one expecting the curtain to rise on an agreeable comedy; for she was indeed pretty as some gay-feathered bird, this Molly Vanhomrigh, with her sparkling eyes, her soft irregular face, her small rounded figure and white little hands.

Esther disliked Lord Mordaunt. She sat silent and contemplated her sister with a mind full of misgiving. Meantime another person was looking across the room at herself, somewhat similarly disquieted on her behalf. This was Mr. Erasmus Lewis, Under Secretary of State, who had joined Lord Mordaunt on the road from Windsor, and entered a little behind him. Mr. Lewis, more courteous than his young acquaintance, paid his devoirs to Mrs. Vanhomrigh, conscious all the time of a certain sealed paper packet in his breast-pocket, superscribed *To Mrs. Esther Vanhomrigh, Junior, at her lodgings in St. James'*. It was not the first time that he had brought such a missive, and he knew the quick flush of carnation colour, the proud smile and brightening glance with which it would be received; for was it not written with the very hand of Jonathan Swift, the poet, the wit, the prince of pamphleteers, the chosen companion of brilliant Bolingbroke and all-powerful Harley? Of Swift, at this moment perhaps the most influential commoner in England, not by any accident of position, but by sheer force of his pre-eminent mind, which seemed for a too brief time, able to subdue all pettier spirits under it, and weld together the mean and shifting elements of political factions.

"I recognize your flowers, Miss Esther," said Mr. Lewis at length, crossing the room and touching the roses in the beau-pot; "the poor Doctor plucked them last evening in my Lord Peterbrow's garden at Parson's Green, while the rest of us were eating the finest peaches in the world."

"'Twas my guardian spirit whispered him to get 'em for me," cried Essie; "I shall threaten him, if he runs after Mrs. Hyde, I'll recall the kind creature,

and then he will 'munch and crunch,' as he says, and have a bad head."

"Recall it at once, my dear miss," said Mr. Lewis. "You have plenty of reason already. *All* the men are not out of town that beauty can afford to be thus undefended by her guardian angel!" And he clapped his little red heels together, and bowed with his hat on his heart. "Besides, what unsuitable things the guardian angel of a fine young miss must whisper to an elderly divine! No no, you must recall it at once."

Essie made her curtsey in response to his bow, but, sticking two or three flowers in her bodice with a mutinous smile, "Sure, sir, I shall not be so ungrateful to Dr. Swift," she answered. "'Twould be an ill return for my nosegay."

"Miss need not be over-grateful for that," sneered Lord Mordaunt, who had a languid but sincere dislike to Esther. "The old putt of a parson deserves no credit for gallantry. 'A plague on these flowers!' says he, 'I must needs pull 'em, and now what shall I do with 'em? I'll give 'em to a lady,' says he, ''tis ever the best way to rid oneself handsomely of one's rubbish;' and you may guess if Mrs. Hyde or any one else wanted 'em after that. So he sends 'em into town by his Lordship's courier, that was just in the saddle coming this road."

"I must own 'twas done somewhat after that fashion," Mr. Lewis apologized, "but his Lordship has barely been presented to the Doctor, and seems not familiar with his manner, while I doubt not Miss Essie knows it well."

"That I do, sir, and none pleases me better," cried she, tossing her chin up with a smile, and disdaining to look at Lord Mordaunt. Then to herself triumphantly, "He gathered them for me, whatever they may say."

And she was right, for Swift had thought of her directly he caught sight of the wide border full of late-blooming roses under Lord Peterborough's southern wall. Just such pink roses Esther had worn stuck in her blue bodice when Swift and she had walked

in Kensington Gardens one evening last June. What an amusement it was to him to secretly detain Lord Peterborough's courier, to pluck them for her, and then to play "hide-and-seek," as he called it, with the ladies, till each one imagined she had had the refusal of his flowers, and then—well it must be confessed that feeing the courier for his trouble had not amused him at all, but still he had done it.

"Can you not persuade Hess to visit Windsor, Mr. Lewis?" asked Mrs. Vanhomrigh, daintily pettish. "Plague take the child! We had planned the pleasantest jaunt there, to see the Doctor, and to take tea with his Lordship on the way home, and now, if you'll believe me, she won't let us go at all. Lord! Lord! Well may the Doctor call her Governor Huff."

"Mr. Lewis, ma'am, has brought persuasion that cannot be resisted," said Esther, with rose-red cheeks and sparkling eyes, and read out from her opened letter:—

"Dr. Swift's compliments and also his duty to the three ladies Van, and he will be obliged to them to know what day they will please to honour his lodgings at Windsor, which he must not call poor, because they are not his own, and because they are very fine, madams all, and within the Castle wall—and so antique and with so fine a prospect from the window they are enough to turn some folks romantick. Ladies, your very humble servant, Dr. Swift, awaits your pleasures."

The letter was dated *Windsor, August 20th*, 1712.

Francis Earle's quick eyes noticed there was another slip of paper inside the letter, which she did not read out. It ran thus:—

"To Miss Hess Vanhom. Pray will Governor Huff accept this? *A formal, a humble invitation must I receive,* says she. Well, Miss, don't that begin formal and end humble? Besides I want some more of your coffee, d'ye hear? This is for Miss Essy's pri-

vate eye: t'other to be shown. 'I cannot be sly,' says she. 'Yes, but you shall be as sly as I please,' says he."

"'Tis plain, child, you must go," cried Madame Van, beaming round on the company. "You see the Doctor won't let you off, though he's the good-naturedest man in the world. We must order the coach early, for there will be the Castle and the Park to visit, and Eton College, and the Doctor's lodgings, and Lord Mordaunt's fine house which we must see, and we might have a water-party too; then there are Mr. Pinchbeck's musical clocks—I wouldn't miss seeing 'em for the world—and then, my dears, we should never pass so near Cousin Purvis at Twittenham without making her our *Howdees*. 'Twill be a most delightful expedition. You must all come, all, Sister Stone, and never consider of the charges, for I'll treat you every one."

CHAPTER II.

The September sky wore its most stainless blue overhead, deepening round the horizon to a vaporous purple, flecked with the pearl-coloured edges of a few faint clouds. The wide valley of the Thames lay transfigured in the rich light and richer mist of early autumn; an atmosphere through which its familiar heights looked blue, remote, mysterious, as mountains in a dream. Nearer the sunshine lay broad on the golden stubble-fields and smooth water-meadows where the young grass was shooting green under the grey willows and the shimmering alder thickets that mark the silver windings of the Thames. The belts and masses of distant woodland, blurred in the haze, looked dark almost to blackness, but here and there on the pale-leaved willows and massive elms a splash of yellow gave token of the waning year, and in the hedgerows great clusters of ripe cornel-berries glowed scarlet in the sun. In the lanes, where bush and bank

were still hung with trails of gold left behind by the harvest waggons as they passed, the flickering shadows of the leaves pressed as close on each other as ever, and made a pleasant coolness, but the sun beat fiercely on the high road.

"Well, I never was hotter, nor ever shall be, if the Lord will forgive me my sins!" laughed Mrs. Vanhomrigh, waving a big fan that sent a pleasant draught through the stuffy coach. She spoke with the cheerfulness of one to whom the discomforts of a jaunt are part of the amusement. The youngest Miss Stone, who sat between her and Mrs. Stone, shared the heat but not her sentiments.

"I protest, ma'am, your fan makes more dust than air," cried she crossly. She had come partly to see Windsor Castle, and partly because she had understood from her mamma that the Vanhomrighs saw a great deal too much fine company; a reprehensible but perhaps agreeable practice. However, only Ginckel and Francis Earle were in the rumble. Ginckel was as much out of temper as herself, fearing the effects of the sun and dust on his pearl-coloured waistcoat and pale blue coat, and afraid to betray his anxiety to Francis. As a man of the world he despised his cousin, whose name was but a title of courtesy, and who owed his place under their roof to Mrs. Vanhomrigh's ridiculous generosity—a form of extravagance with which her son had no sympathy—but though one might be indifferent to the youth's opinion, it was difficult to remain indifferent to his tongue, which was of the sharpest.

Francis was in reality too self-absorbed to have even a sarcasm at the service of another. He was going through that common stage in the development of persons of character, when the limits of their lives seem to have become too narrow to admit of the comfortable exercise of their powers; when they suffer from moral cramps and mental growing-pains, tear at the most immutable barriers with the sanguine impatience of some newly-caught wild creature, and rend the most harmless objects with the fury of a

puppy encouraging its teeth; a stage, in short, when to themselves and others, they are infinitely unpleasant. But Francis' was a practical mind. His grievances were not wholly imaginary, and his present object was perfectly definite, if difficult of attainment. Three-and-twenty years ago his mother, a cousin of Mrs. Vanhomrigh's, had gone to Holland among the household of an ambassador; soon afterwards she had returned to England under the protection of some man of quality. She did not tell her family his name or communicate with them further, for though such an episode was then commonly reckoned trifling and even creditable in the career of a young gentleman, in that of a young lady its disgracefulness was fully admitted. Seven years later, when, Mrs. Vanhomrigh's uncle had unexpectedly risen to be a Canon of Chester, his grandson was brought to his door, fortunately after dark, by a man of business. His daughter was dead. The man of business, Mr. Wilson of Old Windsor, stated that the child's father was willing to act fairly by it; that he would pay a small sum yearly through Mr. Wilson for its education and maintenance, till it had reached the age of twenty-one, and would then consider its case; but on condition that no questions were asked and no trouble of any kind given. If its relations declined to receive it, it was to be put to school at once. The Canon was a widower, a student, a leading ecclesiastic, and this child of six, whose existence it would be difficult to explain, was not a welcome addition to his household. Mrs. Vanhomrigh, who had greatly admired her cousin Fanny, happened at the time to be staying at Chester on her way to Dublin, and with her usual impetuous kind-heartedness, offered to take Fanny's boy off his hands. From that time she honestly endeavoured to treat him as one of her own family, whom as children she was wont to overwhelm for three days with love and attention, and then forget for a week in a whirl of amusement and excitement. He was a shy and sickly but obstinate and fiery child, and would have fared ill at the hands of the two Vanhomrigh boys—for there

were then two—had it not been for the protection of the robust Essie, who, though not a year older than himself, was as big and as ready with her hands as her brothers. Both she and Molly grew fond of Francis. Unlike their own brothers, he was clever enough to be a companion to them, and not strong enough to be domineering. But Esther was his particular ally, either because she was less sensitive than Molly to his sharp tongue, or because he was often ill and she had early constituted herself his nurse. For these or for some subtler reasons, certain contrasts and resemblances in their characters, such as blended in the indefinable just proportion, make friendships and loves that are important and of the essence of life, as distinguished from the many which are trivial and among its accidents. Such being Francis Earle's position in the Vanhomrigh family, it was almost inevitable that Swift's domestication there should not be to his taste. Be the hearthrug never so large, the dog in possession cannot resist an inclination to snarl at the canine stranger who proposes to share it with him. In this case the intruder made matters worse by completely ignoring the occupier. Francis' sharp eyes were sharpened by jealousy and dislike of Swift, and he saw more clearly than any one how day by day Esther's thoughts centred more entirely on her great and brilliant friend. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had given up the sum paid for his maintenance to his education, and until a year ago he had thrown all his fiery energy and stubborn determination into study, and had been not only officially but in every respect a scholar—one who looked forward to literature and the Church as his roads to distinction. Accident, the failure of sundry attempts at verse, and the chance acquisition of a military friend—either this or the natural development of his character, had lately changed the current of his ambitions. When his twenty-first birthday was drawing near, Mr. Wilson wrote to say that his anonymous parent being advised of his excellent parts, had authorized the continuation of his allowance till his Oxford course was completed, and would then see to it that he obtained a

fellowship or a chaplaincy. Francis wrote in return that he should prefer a commission in the army. Mr. Wilson not unnaturally replied that the young man might take his client's offer or leave it. Affairs had been left in this condition, and it occurred to him that he might avail himself of the Vanhomrighs' expedition to Windsor to reopen the matter with the attorney; not indeed to sue, to plead, for that was not his way, but to demonstrate to the man by irresistible arguments how perfectly in the wrong he, Mr. Wilson, was. This seemed the easier because so far he had not discussed the matter with any one but himself.

When the coach went up hill he jumped down and walked to stretch his impatient legs, and to get hotter and increase his irritation by the sight of Esther inside, looking very cool and fair, in spite of the heat. She had put on a blue damask dress, white kerchief and straw hat, which were all particularly fresh and neat. She scarcely noticed him, but leaned back with drooping eyelids and a face sometimes grave, sometimes faintly smiling, but always dreamily happy. Molly sat by her, attired like her sister, and thinking thoughts not very unlike hers, but flushed and restless and full of laughter and gay chatter.

So the coach rolled on, ever nearing the high Castle whose dim majestic towers rise in the background of so many pleasant homely landscapes—spired villages, elm-bordered meadows, and shining reaches of the river—crowning them all with a vision of old romance.

Before the wheels rattled over the stones of Windsor and the coachman urged his tired steeds to one last effort up the hill, two gentlemen were awaiting the coach and its occupants at a tavern opposite the Castle gates. The later of the two to arrive was Lord Mordaunt, who drove up in a neat chaise, very genteelly and becomingly dressed, and wearing a full brown peruke tied with a scarlet ribbon. The other, who wore a clerical gown and bands, had walked over from the Castle a few minutes before his arrival. His Lordship honoured this gentleman

with the slightest possible bow and a carelessly condescending greeting ; he had been taught to expect obsequiousness from parsons, and fancied that, left alone with this one, he could soon teach him his place. The parson paused in his mechanical pacing of the tavern parlour, and looked at Lord Mordaunt for about two minutes, which seemed to that young nobleman a disagreeably long time. He was too young and too ignorant to understand his antagonist's importance in the world, but he instinctively felt his boyish arrogance of rank fall shattered before a far deeper and more masterful pride than his own.

"Your servant, young gentleman," said the parson, removing the terror of his look from the youth's face and returning his bow. "You can sit down."

Before he well knew what he was doing, Lord Mordaunt had sat down, a most unwonted flush suffusing the tired pallor of his handsome features. The other continued his walk up and down, up and down, like a lion in his den. Dr. Swift—the awe-inspiring parson was no less a personage—was about forty-five years old, but considerably younger in appearance, tall, of a stately presence and an impressive countenance. He wore a dark peruke, his eyebrows were black, and the closest shaving left a blue-black shade on cheek and chin ; but his eyes were as azure blue as those of any Phillis or Chloe be-rhymed by the poets, and could more truly than such are feigned to do, smile as brightly or lower as terribly as heaven itself.

After a while he stopped opposite Lord Mordaunt, and looking at him attentively, but after a less annihilating fashion, "Pray, are you not studying at the University, my Lord ?" he asked.

The young man had by this time recovered his presence of mind, and determined to pluck up a spirit.

"Sir, I am at the University, but I am not studying," he answered, not raising his eyes, but speaking to his boot, which he was dusting with an embroidered cambric handkerchief.

"Can you read Greek, my Lord?" asked Swift,

Lord Mordaunt sat up, lifted his eyebrows and smiled superciliously.

"Gad, sir!" he said, "do I look like an usher or a sucking parson?"

"No, young man," returned the Doctor in a quiet but ominous voice; "you do not look like anything with an ounce of brains in its head or of virtue in its heart. And now I have answered your question, you are bound in common civility to answer mine. Can you read Greek?"

Again to his infinite mortification Lord Mordaunt found himself quailing.

"Sir, I cannot," he answered sulkily.

"So much the better, my Lord," said the Doctor, keeping his eye on that of his subject, like a lion-tamer, "so much the better; now I can honestly take a guinea of you. 'Twill be a very small price you will pay for making Homer's acquaintance in an English dress pretty nearly as fine as his Greek one."

"Demme, Doctor, what d'ye mean? The fellow may be in a French dancing dress for all I care! I won't have his beggarly acquaintance at no price." And Lord Mordaunt dug at the boards with his cane. He felt that the situation was getting serious since money was in question.

"We'll pass you that then," said the Doctor. "You shall pay for the honour of assisting the greatest poet of this age."

"O, sir," replied Lord Mordaunt with a sneer, "you should ha' told me before 'twas for yourself! I didn't know you was in difficulties."

Swift made a gesture of impatience: "Mr. Alexander Pope is the gentleman to whose translation you will have the honour to subscribe."

"Gad, Doctor, you must excuse my mistake, but Lord, how the fashions change!" His Lordship took snuff after the manner of Lord Bolingbroke. "Last year they told me *you* was the greatest poet of the age."

"Then they lied," replied the Doctor drily, "or they were fools that believed 'em! If you wish to

know what poetry is, young man, you must read the works of Mr. Pope."

Lord Mordaunt's little attempt to turn the enemy's position having failed, he relapsed into sulkiness. "Damn poetry!" he said, assuming an attitude of resistance, his hands in his pockets, and his legs stretched out straight before him. "What's poetry to me? I am a man of quality."

"Aye, that's just it," roared the grim parson, flashing on him again that terrible look, "that's what your Lordship must pay for. Why do you suppose we free Britons keep such creatures and worship 'em too? Because, think you, 'tis only men of quality that can be idle and profane, ignorant and debauched? On my conscience your lacqueys can do that part of your business as well as you. No, sir, we keep-'em, that they may be splendid, be generous, that they may pay, pay—pay poets for us to read. Come, now your poll-tax, your guinea. A lord and mean? Oh, fie, fie!" And he took out a pocket-book in which a long list of subscriptions, already entered, attested the success of his labours elsewhere.

Lord Mordaunt sat sulkily immovable in body, but swayed this way and that in mind. In the first place, deeply as it galled him, he could not but bow to the dominance of Swift's overpowering personality; in the second, he felt all the dislike of a splendid youth of twenty to the appearance of stinginess. Yet like many other splendid youths, it was only from the appearance of it that he shrunk; for his lavishness to himself was only equalled by his meanness to others.

There was a clatter of hoofs and a rattle of wheels.

"There come the ladies," said his persecutor looking out of the window. "What! Shall they find me dunning you for a guinea—a paltry guinea?"

"'Tis but a guinea, as you say—a cursed guinea," and with an angry laugh the young man fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and flung the coin on the tavern table. Dr. Swift pocketed it and bowed with grave civility. "Your servant, my Lord," he said. "I am obliged to you. Mr. Pope shall be informed of your

Lordship's donation." And he opened the door for Lord Mordaunt to pass out.

They were both on the threshold of the tavern, as the arrivals drove up, but before either had time to touch the coach door, it was flung wide, and Esther leaped to the ground and stood with both white ungloved hands stretched out in greeting. The unclouded sun that streamed full on them all, turned the blond curls on her neck to gold. Her eyes smiled shining in the transparent shadow of her straw hat; her young red mouth smiled too, not dreamily now, but full of a happiness too eager and too innocent for self-observant restraint.

For a moment she stood so, and then drawn by an irresistible magnetism and scarcely conscious of what he did or of who saw him, Swift stepped forward and took her hands. He wondered, as he loosed them, with a shock of dismay, how long he had been standing there with her hands in his and his eyes smiling down into hers. But it was not a noticeable fraction of time to any but those two. Lord Mordaunt, still very excusably sulky, ostentatiously ignoring the other occupants of the coach, bowed to Molly with an air of ownership, and leaned on his cane till it should be her turn to descend, wondering meantime where the hectoring beggar of a parson had picked up his fine bow. For he had an undeniably fine bow, and when it so pleased him, fine manners too, which were all the more attractive because his courtesy was apt to have a vein of satire beneath it, and his rudeness to be the veil of some refined kindness. He stood bareheaded at the steps, handing down the impetuous Mrs. Vanhomrigh, who was talking too fast to be answered, and jumped out so precipitately that her petticoat hitched on the step and she would have fallen, had he not caught her with one hand and dexterously disentangled it with the other.

"I'm obliged to you, Doctor," she cried. "Ginckel couldn't have done it cleverer. There's a compliment for you!" She smiled at him slily, aware in spite of her maternal feelings, that Ginckel held

no particular place in the Doctor's esteem. So long as Esther did, what matter?

"Well, yes, Madam Van—from his mother," replied the Doctor drily, and glanced at Ginckel, who having brushed off the dust of the journey and combed his flaxen peruke with a pocket-comb before entering the town, now stood ecstatically conscious of his irreproachable clothes and of several fashionable ladies looking in the direction of the party.

At this juncture Erasmus Lewis arrived to the relief of Mrs. Vanhomrigh, who had begun to fear that the Doctor would be forced to devote too much attention to herself to be as assiduous to Essie as she could wish. She flung herself on Mr. Lewis, and the secretary, conscious of a worthy spouse in London whose existence preserved him from all entanglements, mightily enjoyed the attentions of the graceful and lively widow.

So the procession moved on to the entrance of the Castle, whose beauties and treasures their two privileged entertainers, Dr. Swift and Mr. Lewis, were to show them.

"Miss," said Lord Mordaunt in a low voice, leaning over Molly and pressing the arm which lightly, as for form's sake, was locked in his, "you'll be most infernally tired if you visit this Castle—a Gothic dungeon fitter for mice than men. Come, now, why shouldn't we sneak off and divert ourselves in the park, and let 'em find us when they've done?"

As he spoke his long brown eyes and thin but well-curved lips smiled with an appealing almost pathetic sweetness. This smile of his was not his personal property; it was a family heirloom, like the Peterborough pearls, only it came from the maternal side, and it had quite as little relation to his inner man as the jewel on his finger. Molly did not know that; she could not help returning his look with eloquent bright eyes and rose-red blush, and hesitating to articulate a cruel denial. Esther, however, did not hesitate. Even the absorbing interest of Swift's society, and the nervous dread lest he should find her conversation tedious or insufficient,

which always beset her on meeting him after an absence, could not overpower her anxiety on her sister's account. At the moment Lord Mordaunt spoke her own cavalier happened to be in consultation with Mr. Lewis, and she turned round sharply on the youth with a frosty smile.

"You bear a conscience, indeed, my Lord," she said. "Here are we poor females at the expense of coach-hire to see Windsor Castle, and never a word of warning you give us till we stand at the gate, when you tell us there's nothing to see."

"'Pon honour, ladies, I did not understand the Castle was your object," returned his Lordship, with a certain insolence in his manner of meeting her gaze which increased Esther's dislike to him.

"Come, Molly," she said, "we will not be frightened out of seeing it now we're here."

"Oh, pray, Miss Vanhomrigh, see it ten times over, if so please you," he answered coldly, throwing the lace ends of his Steinkirk over his shoulder. "But, 'twould be a sin to wear out Miss Molly's charming little feet on such a pilgrimage."

"'Tis to the shrine of Loyalty, my Lord," returned Molly, passing through the entrance in obedience to her sister's wishes and her own sense of decorum, but casting back such a look of regret and apology as must have softened the most justly irritated lover. Lord Mordaunt, however, was not a lover.

"Your servant, ladies," he said, taking off his hat. "Vanhomrigh, you have seen this confounded rat-hole fifty times. Let's take a stroll in the town."

Ginckel willingly made his bow to his cousin Anna, and the two young men went off together. It was then observed that Francis Earle was not of the party.

He had by this time reached Mr. Wilson's red-brick house, and was sounding a brave rat-tat on the mahogany door. The lawyer was an old gentleman, and having transacted a good deal of business between his eight o'clock dish of tea and his breakfast, he was now resting and would not have disturbed himself for fifty Mr. Earles. Francis waited in the

bare room, where two elderly and unconversational clerks sat at their desks. The windows looked into the dingy foliage of a shrubbery, and the only object of interest was a large map of North America hanging on the walls, with the British and French forts and plantations accurately marked. One of the clerks told him it had been given to their master by his client, the Earl of Peterborough, who had an interest in the plantations. For a long dull time he waited. A special courier arrived and was shown in to Mr. Wilson before him. The Dutch clock ticked on and on; the cogency of the arguments he had prepared to support his appeal seemed evaporating at every tick, like some volatile essence exposed to the air.

When at last he had entered Mr. Wilson's handsome library, had seated himself near the leather armchair that contained the old man, and been subjected for a few minutes to a short dry cough and drier questions, the process of evaporation was complete. The effect of this sense of defeat upon Francis was only to rouse his temper and his obstinacy. Had Mr. Wilson been in his shrewder prime, he might have lent a more sympathetic ear to the young man's demands, as recognizing, not their reasonableness, but the signs of uncommon parts in him who preferred them. As it was, he looked with a passing curiosity at this youth with the small alert figure, the thin face at once mobile and determined, and hawk-like glance. He was struck by a likeness, less in feature than in general air, in tricks of manner and expression, to a distinguished person of his acquaintance. But there was nothing surprising in that. Presently such superficial curiosity vanished in the consciousness that he was engaged with a self-willed, disagreeable fellow; a fellow with the most amazing notion of his claim to have what he wanted in life, instead of being thankful for what he could get; who, last but not least in the catalogue of his offences, seemed to think that he could oblige him, Benjamin Wilson, to take trouble, and to trouble that distinguished person his anonymous client. Mr. Wil-

son stated clearly that he was paid, not to importune his client, but to save him from importunities of this nature; in Mr. Earle's own interest he had not communicated and should not communicate to that gentleman the peevish and ungrateful remonstrances of his dependent. So, pale with suppressed rage, the young man made his bow, and a sober-suited serving-man closed the big mahogany door behind him.

The little cloisters at Windsor are, as every one knows, very little indeed. There are to be found no length of groined roof, no carven-arches opening on the green turf of College quadrangle or Cathedral close. The ancient lodgings of the Prebendaries surround a small oblong court, their projecting upper stories rest on timber supports, and below these on a rough-cast wall; a similar gangway with timber supports on each side, runs across the court. The low irregular doors that open on to the flagged path seem of all ages and sorts; here the modern paint or varnish, there the Tudor oak clamped with iron, or the gracefully wrought knocker of the later Stuarts. The houses too bear within the mark of every generation. Yet the sunshine travelling round the court summer after summer for the last hundred and eighty years finds little altered there, as it throws sharp shadows on the gabled roof, and gilds the rough-cast walls, and darkens the shade within the cloister, just catching the jewelled gleam of some trailing nasturtium or Virginia creeper that overflows into the light from its box on the ledge of the cloister wall. Whether any one of the sixteen Prebendaries who owned these lodgings in the reign of Queen Anne kept a flower-box opposite his door, is doubtful, but it is certain that the path to it was no wider then than now, and therefore that Mrs. Stone and her hoop-petticoat must have had some difficulty in manœuvring as far as Dr. Swift's house. Even slight Mrs. Vanhomrigh presented a somewhat squeezed appearance, as she stood with her flowered-silk mantua billowing unevenly about her, the dust

of a dungeon into which she had been the first to descend, and which she had pronounced "vastly diverting," still visible on her smart French hood. Esther and Molly, belonging to that numerous body of ladies whom Mr. Spectator had led to resist hoops and content themselves with full petticoats, were not inconvenienced by the narrowness of their quarters. The five ladies were now leaving the cloisters in company with Doctor Swift, who carried a basket covered with a white cloth.

"'Tis no manner of use, Doctor," cried Mrs. Vanhomrigh, shaking her fan at him. "The provender is waiting for us at the Park gates, and you that pretend to hate waste, stand wasting good time which you know they say's money."

"Wasting money! Ay, those be the words to fling in my face, Madam Van!" replied Swift pettishly; "because I am a good prudent manager you must needs treat me as a curmudgeon that will not spare his friends a dinner."

"There are dinners and dinners," murmured Molly, making a little grimace, "and for my part, I would rather have one of Essie's providing than of his."

Esther frowned upon her pertness.

"Sure, Doctor," cried Madam Van, rather frightened, "it's nothing of the sort I'm meaning. But 'twould be monstrous to trouble a poor bachelor like you to provide food for us eight hungry mortals on a jaunt, that will eat like eighteen."

"Well, well, if you will not peck, you shall at any rate booze at my expense," said he; and held up his basket with an air of triumphant hospitality not fully justified by its size or contents, which consisted of two rather small bottles of French wine. Mrs. Vanhomrigh, conscious of a store in her own basket better fitted to satisfy the wants of her son and Lord Mordaunt, expressed her thanks with effusion.

"And pray, Miss Essie," asked Swift gravely, waiting at the cloister-entrance as the ladies squeezed out, "what do you reckon that I should have lost by you all, had Madam Van condescended to accept of my dinner? I don't ask *her*, for 'tis my belief the

agreeable wretch knows no more about money than that silver is cleaner than copper and gold prettier than silver!"

"Lord, Doctor, why should I trouble to know, while I have Esther to manage for me?" said Mrs. Vanhomrigh gaily, more than contented to suffer any condemnation that involved praise of her daughter, especially from his lips, and quite unaware that to manage for her was an impossible task. Esther smiled teasingly.

"If you ask, sir, with the intention of offering us half-a-crown apiece, the question is useless,"—had she not known him attempt such a benefaction?—"few of us would like to take it, and nobody would dare."

"Half-a-crown?" repeated Swift, quite startled. "My dear Hess, could I not give my friends a simple dinner for less than that? Wine, mind you, is provided." And he again held up his basket.

Esther looked down and blushed for him, and then looked up and began courageously: "You could, no doubt, if you chose to be——" and there her courage failed.

"Parsimonious!" said he, sharply finishing her sentence. "You need not speak the word. I have heard it before. But I did not expect it from you."

"'Twas yourself, not I, that said it," she replied.

They walked on together, both silent, and Swift moody. When they had passed through the picturesque gateway into the Horseshoe Cloisters, he stepped aside to the west door of St. George's Chapel, near which was chained a venerable poor-box. Then he turned—a tall, black-robed figure against the gray background of the Chapel wall—and faced the ladies with a look half-serious, half-mocking, and wholly bitter, on his countenance.

"Madams all," he said, holding up a coin to the sun, "I take you to witness that I refuse to make anything by Madam Van's greediness and extravagance, which prompted her to bring her own dinner. I would divide the money between her daughters, but the hussies are too proud to take it; so here goes

a pound to the poor of the parish, and many a good dinner may it buy!" And they heard the gold drop in among the few and humble coins already in the box.

Mrs. Stone was staring, fanning herself slowly and mechanically with a half-closed fan; she had not exactly taken in the sense of the little scene, but it deepened her general impression that for a doctor of divinity and one living in the shadow of a prebend, if not actually a prebendary, Dr. Swift was reprehensibly unusual. Anna had come prepared to make small jokes on Esther's elderly gallant, and though up to this moment she had been overawed by his appearance and manner, she now put her handkerchief to her mouth and giggled to her heart's content. Even Molly's smile was not quite good-natured, for seeing how remorselessly Esther marked the flaws in her sister's idol, she could not expect her own, however respected, to pass uncriticised. It must be owned that the flourish with which the Doctor parted with his pound showed it to be rather dearer to him than it should have been. Essie did not look at his action so closely, but accepted it as completely atoning for anything that might have displeased in his former conduct. As they walked side by side to the Castle gate, he said in a low voice:

"It cuts me to the heart, Miss Essie, that you should call me parsimonious."

"I did not, I did not," she whispered vehemently. He continued:

"To be neither liked nor understood by the greater part of mankind is the lot of every man of sense, and I trust I can take my share of ill words without whining. But I own when one I have supposed my friend, even though 'tis but such a brat as you, repeats the dull censure of the crowd, I feel it beyond reason; for sure 'tis not in reason to expect to find a perfectly true friend more than once in a lifetime."

He paused, and thought, which "puts a girdle round the earth in fifty seconds," brought before him another and a lovelier Esther. Alas! poor Essie!

She had better cause than she knew to turn upon him that silent, reproachful look.

"So help me, child," he went on. "You know the thing I save by my parsimony, though I write it in pounds, shillings, and pence, is in truth my independence. I love money? Yes, I love it as much now, as when I sent back the Lord Treasurer's thousand pounds, though he owed me a million. 'Twas more than Steele or Peterborough or Bolingbroke, ay or Addison, would have done. To what do I owe it that I am the friend of Ministers, and not their slave? To my parsimony, young woman—and if I have enough to spare for folk less fortunate than myself, 'tis again because I am parsimonious—or called so, by them that squander so much food and drink on the well-fed that they have none left for the starving."

"But I know all that, sir," she said in a low voice. "Why do you defend yourself? It is not needed. I fancy I understand you very well, and I am sure I know what I owe you. Ah! Don't you remember how different I used to be, when you first came to London? 'Twas you that taught me to seek order and cleanliness before fineness, and to count it dishonest to spend more than I had got. It is hard, very hard sometimes"—and she caught a little sigh and stopped it half way—"but I always try to do what you would think right."

"You are a good child, Hess," he said gently. "If you were not, you might say what you liked of me. And you have a good head on your shoulders too. As to that poor dear creature, your mother, if she will not be guided by you, I sometimes fear she will end in no better company than the bailiffs."

"Poor mamma! She at any rate is no example of your saying that a spendthrift is first cousin to a miser. She is all generosity. But there are others—— Ah! if our blood were gold, *he* would suck it."

"The Colonel?" returned Swift drily. "Yes. Nature was a fool to let such as him wear the breeches. Not that he is worse than other young men of fashion; but the difference is, he need not

have been one. Bah! what a generation it is! Do you think him worse than his friends?"

"No," she answered shortly, and for a few moments walked on, frowning straight in front of her with her Chinese fan pressed hard against her red under-lip, and biting the top of it with her strong white teeth. Then—"I sometimes think I hate men!" she cried.

There was no accent of coquetry in the words; they sounded bitterly sincere. Yet they were no sooner spoken than with a sudden charming change of countenance she turned to Swift. "But I don't really," she said. He met her smile with that incomparably arch glance of his blue eyes which sufficed to bring even strangers under his spell.

"Then we agree, as an Irishman would say, for I sometimes think I hate women. The truth is that once on a time I loved 'em well enough, if only they were fine and witty and kind; but now I can take tea with half a dozen of the finest drabs of quality in London to wait on me and be so dull all the while I wish myself anywhere else. Lord! I have even said to myself," and he made a wry mouth, "I would almost rather be drinking ratsbane in the Sluttery and hear Governor Huff scold, scold, scold, all the time."

Essie laughed a little laugh full of the music of love and happiness. They were now in the street of the town nearing the Park gate, where the provisions and the young men were to meet them, and at that moment Francis Earle joined their party. Esther's laugh jarred upon him.

The Colonel, Erasmus Lewis and Lord Mordaunt, and Mrs. Vanhomrigh's man carrying her basket, were waiting for them at the gate, and the party moved on through the chequered shadows of the Long Walk at first in a compact body, but gradually straggling into groups. Dr. Swift being a fast walker, he and Esther were soon a little in front of the others, while an accident to Molly's shoe-ribbon made an excuse for Lord Mordaunt to loiter behind and offer to tie it for her, which he did not, however, do. But while she was tying it, he was graciously pleased to observe that

thenceforward he should not think quite so meanly of the leather shoes the ladies had taken to wearing, since on some feet even those looked genteel. Molly expressed an opinion in favour of them for country walking, but his Lordship declared that though for men who could hunt and shoot and drink, the country might be tolerable, he never could imagine what could take an elegant female there.

"Why, Philomel! Romantic shades! Purling brooks! to be sure," laughed Molly, shrugging her shoulders; and then they both laughed together at the absurd notion of enjoying the beauties of nature.

"You miss out the most important item, dear miss," said Lord Mordaunt. "Sighing swains are to be found there, the poets assure us."

"'Tis the yawns that break into sighs, and the poets poor things, mistake 'em," returned she.

"No, no! I feel the rural fit is on me," and he heaved a gentle sigh or two. "Tell me, Miss Molly, when 'tis on you, for I have heard say the shepherd nymph is kinder to her Corydon than you belles of the town are to us poor fellows."

He cast a languid glance at the figure beside him, so fresh and neat in the blue damask dress and white neckerchief, and at the soft young face, which, however, quickly drooped beneath his eyes, and left him nothing but the top of a Leghorn hat to contemplate. So they paced on side by side beneath the elms, to all appearance a well-matched boy and girl couple pursuing the same harmless happiness, but in their real thoughts and feeling as immeasurably divergent from each other as the innocent must be from the wicked.

Meantime Mrs. Stone was prosing on about her sons, the prosperity of Edward and the genius of George, not caring much whether any one answered her or not, and between the answers which politeness now and then dictated, Mrs. Vanhomrigh passed silently through a number of exciting and delightful experiences. First she had to choose the preferment that would be most suitable to Dr. Swift, and having secured, as the first step, the Deanery of Windsor, she

passed on to arrange the more delicate affair of Molly's marriage. Lord Peterborough would of course be averse to the match at first, but the intercession of his admired friend and her own son-in-law, Dr. Swift, and the prayers and tears of his last remaining son would at length melt his paternal heart; he would consent to see her Molly, and own the young lady's charms made full amends for her inequality of birth and fortune. By this time Mrs. Stone's conversation had moved on from her sons to her daughters, or rather to the daughter about to be married.

"We ha'n't made up our minds if 'tis to be in St. Martin's or in St. Paul's, Covent Garden," she was saying.

"Well, St. Martin's for a single wedding, say I," replied Mrs. Vanhomrigh briskly. "But if the two sisters was to be married the same day, why, St. Paul's is the roomier."

"The same day!" repeated Mrs. Stone in slow astonishment. "We've had luck enough I'm sure in getting Mr. Harris, that's a good match for any young woman, though with a fortin of her own, without marrying 'em both off the same day."

"You're right, Sukey," returned Madam Van, half listening, half reflecting with genuine regret on her own future deserted condition. "'Twould be a sad thing for a mother to lose both her daughters at once, and might cause a mortification to the elder, if her younger sister should have a bridegroom greatly superior in rank to her own—for of course he must take the *pas*."

This was a new and anxious question, and brought a wrinkle to the widow's smooth brow.

"I wish I could think as well of Anna's chances as you do, Esther," replied Mrs. Stone in a burst of unwonted confidence. "But I sometimes say to Stone the men can't be so blind as not to see her temper in the corners of her mouth;" then recollecting herself, "not that there's cause to be anxious about the girl. She's got her health, and what with that and her pious bringing-up and her little fortin and all, we may be sure, as Mr. Stone says, the Lord will pro-

vide. Yet I can't think she'll go off better than Sarah, or be married the same day."

"As to the same day," rejoined Mrs. Vanhomrigh, "you are certainly right. 'Twould be more convenient to have a twelvemonth, say, between 'em. For 'twould be but sense in buying their clothes to consider the different rank of the bridegrooms; and yet 'tis a difficult matter for a mother not to treat both her dear girls the same. 'Tis true the money might be made up in household stuff and furniture."

"'Tis a terrible costly matter to marry a daughter," said Mrs. Stone, shaking her head gloomily. "Even Mr. Stone and me that have been sober saving people all our lives, and, thank the Lord, not poorer than most, can scarcely bear the expense. As to clothes, Sarah is inclined to be tasty, but I tell her 'twould be most unbecoming in a clergyman's wife to be dressed up modish."

"Oh, an ordinary clergyman's wife, I grant you," broke in Mrs. Vanhomrigh. "'Tis a different matter with the wife of a Dean or Bishop. *She* should be quietly but handsomely dressed—grey lute-string say, branched with silver."

"'Tis true Mr. Harris is like to rise in the Church," replied Mrs. Stone complacently. "Sarah would be glad to have a talk with you, sister, about dresses and mantua-makers, in case you could recommend a reasonable one. For my part I think myself too old to value such vanities; but the child already begins to trouble about 'em, and bade me not forget to ask Molly for the pattern of the new Macklin commode she was wearing o' Tuesday."

The subject of lace commodes and mantua-makers was one of irresistible interest to Mrs. Vanhomrigh, and so at this point the two ladies' divergent streams of thought met and flowed in the same channel.

Mr. Lewis had been walking with Anna Stone, and the remarks of that gossip-loving young lady seemed to have caused him some uneasiness. Drifting from her side he took young Earle's arm and walked on with him in silence for a bit. Then after clearing his throat nervously once or twice—

"Mr. Earle," he said, "if Colonel Vanhomrigh can be trusted to act with secrecy and discretion, there is a confidential subject on which I would willingly offer him advice."

"Ha'n't I seen a parrot and a weathercock at your lodgings in town, sir?" returned Francis, who was in no very amiable mood: "Your confidence and your advice would be a deal better bestowed on them than on the Colonel."

This expression of opinion was offensive to Mr. Lewis's cautious mind; he muttered something deprecatory about his young friend, Vanhomrigh, and cleared his throat several times before resuming. However, in the course of a long if not intimate acquaintance he had had reason to think well of Francis Earle's judgment, and he knew him to be practically a member of the Vanhomrigh family; so he made up his mind to go on.

"It being admitted that the Colonel's discretion is not wholly to be depended upon, I turn to you, sir, as having influence with these ladies?"

"Influence? I? Not a penn'orth, sir," replied Francis; and in a less biting tone— "But I am certainly bound to be very much at their service."

"I imagined you not ungrateful, young man," said Mr. Lewis, "and Mrs. Vanhomrigh told me that you have influence with the person most concerned." He cleared his throat again. "I think you must know that Miss Esther Vanhomrigh's name is beginning to be mentioned in connection with that of my friend, Dr. Swift?"

The idea suggested was not exactly new to Francis, but it gave him a new prick of annoyance thus brought to him from without. His cold answer, however, betrayed nothing of his sensations.

"In that case," he said, "I hope soon to hear that Dr. Swift has made proposals in form."

"Ah, my young friend," almost whispered the lawyer, pressing his arm and speaking into his ear, "that is just what is so very unlikely to happen."

"May I ask why, sir?" returned Francis haughtily. "Has not Miss Vanhomrigh enough wit, beauty and

fortune to satisfy a parson on his promotion—one that's no chicken either?"

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear sir; there's no fault to find with Miss Esther. The obstacle is quite different."

"What is it then?" asked Francis.

"Another woman, Mr. Earle."

"Oh, that's it, is it," said Francis, and uttering a malediction on the Doctor, he stood still. He had uttered it without raising or much altering his voice, but Mr. Lewis flushed with nervousness and vexation.

"Hush! young man, hush! Such language is most unbecoming."

"My language becomes his conduct, if it don't his cloth."

"Pray do not imagine I hint at any unbecoming conduct," Mr. Lewis hastened to say. "But I happen to be acquainted with a young woman named Johnson, who was brought up at Sir William Temple's. My friend Swift was secretary there, when she was a little child, and took a fancy to her. She afterwards invested the little money Sir William left her in Ireland, and went herself to reside there, when Dr. Swift was secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant. 'Twas a strange step for a young woman to take, to be sure, but she hath always with her a respectable widow as companion, and I never heard aught against her character, except that she had a mind to be Mrs. Swift. In Ireland they have thought these five years that he would marry her, were it not for their lack of fortune. I have known Mrs. Johnson for years, and she is as beautiful and agreeable a young woman as ever I saw. Sure he would have done more prudently and honourably to marry her without waiting for preferment. But remember, sir, this in confidence," he added, glancing uneasily at the not very distant figure of Swift. "My friend has never spoken of Mrs. Johnson to me as of a lady to whom he was in any way contracted, but on the contrary as an intimate friend and a kind of ward of his."

Francis was silent for a little; then he said, "You

may trust me, Mr. Lewis, not to chatter about your friend's or any one else's affairs, but what use I am to make of your information I know not. 'Tis plain, I cannot tell Miss Vanhomrigh he is contracted to another. Besides," he added coldly, "is it not an impertinence on our part to imply that the matter is of moment to her?"

Mr. Lewis shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Pray, my dear Mr. Earle, don't let us talk nonsense," he answered.

"Besides it would do no good for an insignificant creature like myself to tell Miss Vanhomrigh anything to Dr. Swift's disadvantage," continued Francis.

"To his disadvantage!" exclaimed Mr. Lewis, shocked. "Certainly not. There is nothing to be told. Never was a man more careful of his reputation. Only as a friend to both ladies I—— in short think it better Miss Vanhomrigh should know of the other's existence."

"Then pray sir, tell her yourself. I am not the man to do it, for," Francis cried with a sudden burst of frankness to himself and to the lawyer, "for I hate Swift."

Mr. Lewis had just time to hold up his hand in silent reprobation before Ginckel and Anna joined them. The party now gradually fell together, and coming to a wide grassy space they spread their cloth at the edge of it.

The turf was still somewhat yellow from the August drought. It had been nibbled short by a herd of deer, that were now grazing on the other side of the wide space, under a group of Scotch firs, whose stems and the grazing herd beneath them, showed in patches of tawny red where the sunshine caught them through the scattered shade of the branches. Behind the improvised table of the party, and on either side of them, the forest stood away, still dark with the leafage of late summer, but from time to time there was heard among the branches a long low breath, the sigh of the coming autumn, and a flight of yellow leaves drifted slowly to the ground.

It was a merry dinner party. Swift was in his

happiest mood, witty, kind and courteous to all the world, the Vanhomrighs in high spirits, and every one in good temper except Francis Earle, whom nobody minded. Madam Van, as having in her the strongest Irish vein, was the most amusing and also the noisiest of her family. When it came to her challenging the company round to sing "Hopped she" against her, and several had attempted it and ridiculously failed, Lord Mordaunt thought it time to go. In singing this ancient song the prize is awarded to the person who can longest continue the chorus—

"Once so merrily hopped she,
Twice so merrily hopped she."

taking a sip from his glass between each line, without being guilty of a falling-off in tune or in time, which is beaten by an impartial person. His Lordship, who was somewhat silent and habitually reserved in general society, would not for worlds have played the fool to it; a part which indeed it takes much native gaiety and spontaneity to play with grace. He looked at his watch, and rising, remarked to Ginckel that it was nigh on three o'clock and time for them to be starting. It had been arranged that he and Ginckel should drive on to his house to make preparation for the ladies, who were to follow by boat, for Mrs. Vanhomrigh had quite made up her mind that a water-party must not be omitted from the day's pleasuring. Their coach with an escort was to call for them at Lord Mordaunt's and take them back to town. The two young men walked off, arm in arm, and the rest proceeded to help pack up the dinner; a proceeding only interrupted by a lively passage of arms between Swift and Madam Van, who would willingly have left the site of their encampment marked by the half-devoured carcases of fowls, several pieces of bread and the wreck of a pasty. Swift having vainly pressed her to collect these remains, at length did so himself, and making a parcel of them—

"This will be a good meal for Patrick and Mrs.

Brent and myself," he said gravely ; "and afterwards a rare basketful for the poor soul that comes for the broken meat. Ay, ay, you may laugh, Madam Van, but you are a proud, extravagant hussy, and will come to a bad end. And so will Moll there, that laughs too because I speak wisely."

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE they reached the river the sun was low enough to be veiled by the autumnal haze. It was one of those pearl-gray afternoons which perhaps best become the pastoral beauty of the winding Thames, though "lovely all times it lies." They were rather too many to be taken by one waterman, and Francis earnestly entreated Esther to come with him in a smaller boat. Swift was to go part of the way with them and to be put out on the bank at a place from which there was a convenient field-path back to Windsor. It was therefore with an effort that she consented to go with Francis, but she knew his face too well not to notice that it was unusually pale and worn, and she felt a little pang of something like remorse as she realized how absent he, and indeed all the others whom she was accustomed to consider, had been from her thoughts during the past few hours of Paradise.

Rowing was not then, as now, a fashionable exercise ; indeed exercise in general was not fashionable, and Ginckel would have both smiled and shuddered at the notion of handling the oars with his slim white fingers. But Francis Earle's restless energy was physical as well as mental, and at Oxford the excuse of fishing had taken him many a long row on the Upper Thames.

The large boat was the first to start, moving slowly to the regular stroke of a single waterman. As Francis was pulling after them Esther leaned back over the stern to look again on Windsor, the bridge, the steep red-roofed town clinging round the foot of the rock,

the great Castle itself rising over all; here Cæsar's tower, like some mightier bastion of the grey and naked cliff from which it sprang, there high embattled walls, their bases hidden in deep-foliaged elms, and higher still a confused mass of gabled roofs and clustering pinnacles piled dark against the sky. In the face of that huge wall her eyes sought vainly the little window of the Prebendary's lodging where she had stood not many hours ago looking down on the river. The laden craft in front, containing the rest of the party, moved on, floating like a bouquet of bright flowers on the pale and tranquil surface of the water. She could see Swift there, his hand over the side, watching sometimes the clear water bubble between his fingers and sometimes the advance of the smaller boat. Madam Van and Molly began to sing, first humming low, as they tried to remember the music, and then their sopranos breaking out clear and sweet into "*Chloris in native purple bright.*"

As Francis gained upon the waterman, they called to Esther to take a second, and she joined them with her low *mezzo*, small in compass but full in tone. Francis did not, however, slacken his stroke when the boats drew together, and was soon leading the way. Essie left off singing and complained that they had left the other boat too far behind.

"'Tis the fault of my rowing, I know," he replied gravely, continuing as before. "Just so—so it goes. I cannot mend it."

"Perversity!" she cried, her head turned in the opposite direction. "If I wished to go faster, there would be some sense in your answer."

"Ah! you do not like a civil excuse," he returned, putting a little more force into his strokes; "then I must try an uncivil one—as this. Pray, young woman, what honour or pleasure is there in rowing the second in a duet? You might as well expect me to be gratified at taking the big drum and the double bass on board my wherry, while the rest of the Lord Mayor's orchestra were playing away on his Lordship's barge."

"Sure, then, you had better have Molly. She will

be pleased to come," said Esther with alacrity. "If she's too timid to change places on the water, we can easily put into the bank there."

Francis laughed silently, not seeming to enjoy his own mirth. "I did not say that it was the truth," he returned, "I only said 'twas an uncivil excuse, and so it is."

Esther, still leaning and looking back with her chin on her hand, shrugged her shoulder.

"You're an odd, tiresome fellow," she observed; and then there fell a silence.

"Yes, that is all I am," he answered at last, without looking up, "an odd, tiresome fellow. 'Tis time I was told so, is't not, Hess?"

She turned and looked at him in silence.

"What is the matter, Frank?" she asked.

Then he told her. He was not lavish of words or sentiments but he made his meaning clear to her, at least as far as it was clear to himself. His long and complete reserve on the subject had given a certain morbid strength to the ambitions and discontents which he at length expressed, and besides these, he owned he was tormented by a keen curiosity, to discover the carefully-guarded secret of his parentage, though aware that the discovery was unlikely to be of use to him. In implying an accusation of Esther's indifference to his feelings during the past year, he seemed to her exceedingly unjust, since he had never expressed them to her. But sympathy is not the consequence of confidences, it is the magnet which attracts them. The truth was that for some time one powerful and increasing influence had been sensibly changing the orbit of Esther's life, and of this Francis was better aware than herself. But circumstances and character had given her the feelings and responsibilities of the mother rather than the daughter of the Vanhomrigh family, and whatever the future destructive force of passion, it could not as yet undo the habit of years. So it seemed very natural to both her and Francis to be floating together on the quiet water among the wide evening fields, and that he should have for the moment all her attention and

all her sympathy. Counsel there was none to give, except a counsel of patience, which was of course received with contemptuous impatience. Their conversation on the subject did not last long, being carried on in that kind of oral shorthand in use among intimate but reserved friends who neither care nor require to give full expression to their feelings. Then they fell silent, each pursuing a separate and engrossing train of thought, but Francis continuing to row with all his might.

"Pray now," she said, "what is the meaning of this ridiculous haste? We are Lord knows how far ahead already. The Doctor is to be landed before we reach Lord Mordaunt's, and 'twould scarcely be civil to let him go without saying farewell."

"We will drift presently," he replied, "and wait the other waterman's good pleasure."

So after some dozen more vigorous strokes, he turned toward the bank, shipped the oars, and stood on the seat to put aside the long drooping branches of an unpollarded willow, allowing the boat to glide in under them. When his face was out of sight behind a veil of greenery, some perfectly aimless impulse prompted him to ask:

"Hess, do you know one Mrs. Esther Johnson?"

"I have heard the name," she answered carelessly, "but I scarce know how."

"She is so old and close a friend of Dr. Swift's, I supposed you must be acquainted," returned he, taking his coat up from the bottom of the boat and putting it on with as unconcerned an air as he was able.

Esther gave an exclamation of annoyance quite unconnected with Mrs. Johnson. One of the oars must have been insecurely shipped, and then caught by a rebounding branch of willow, for it had gone overboard, and was already out of reach. Francis punted after it as well as he could with the remaining oar, as it floated at a pace which ought to have made him consider, down a backwater of the river. But he was an inexpert punter, and the water deep, and though several times they came

near enough to the truant oar to induce him and Esther alternately to almost upset the boat in their ineffectual struggles to gain possession of it, it still eluded their grasp.

"Stop, pray, stop!" cried Esther suddenly, "we are going down a weir."

A turn of the stream had brought them close in sight of a ruined mill and a broken-down weir, which had been concealed from them so far by the trees on the banks. Their ears might indeed have warned them of danger, as well as the increasing swiftness of the current, but the monotonous rush of weirs is a sound so common on the Thames that it becomes almost unobservable and the excitement of the oar-hunt had made them heedless.

"What shall we do, Francis?"

"Lose the oar," replied he drily.

"Do go back!" she cried.

"I am trying to," he answered; but his best efforts did not succeed in keeping the boat's head up the stream. It drifted steadily nearer the weir.

"Can I do nothing, Francis!" asked Essie, as quietly as though they were still lying under the willow.

"Pull up a plank," he said, "and try to row with it. This punting's of no use."

She did so quickly, and sitting down beside him, followed his example as he bent to his oar. She was strong, but had scarcely ever attempted to row before, and the plank was but an awkward substitute for an oar. However, her attention was so concentrated on her efforts that she hardly realized the situation, when Francis cried with an imprecation:

"'Tis of no use, Hess. Keep hold of the plank—I can't swim."

But in spite of this inability, he put his arm round her, with a vague idea that he must be able to help her somehow, as the boat turned broadside on and rocked for a moment at the top of the weir before turning upside down. For an instant both its occupants disappeared under the eddying foam below. Happily for Esther when she came to the surface again, she

found herself close against the overturned boat. She had presence of mind enough to seize hold of it, and in a minute more it was carried against the stout branch of a broken-down willow, which lay almost flat on the face of the stream. Essie was thus enabled to lay hold of the branch and pull herself along it to the bank, if bank it could be called; for the willow formed an island by itself in the pool below the weir, and when she had with some difficulty climbed out of the water, it was on the trunk that she stood.

"Francis! Oh, Francis!" she shrieked in anxious terror, as she saw a dark head appear in the midst of the foam. He had not been thrown so far out as herself, but he had still hold of his oar, and in a minute more the eddy must bring him too somewhere near the willow. Quick as thought, she ran out on the projecting branch, and flinging herself on her face, prepared to catch him as he passed. But, even so, it was evident she would not be able to reach him. With a desperate effort she bent down a long branch till the water rippled through its twigs, and it lay right across the way her cousin was being carried. He caught it, and still in fear lest it should give way in his hands, she pushed the boat out towards him, and succeeded in holding it there till he had swung himself up beside her on the tree. When they were both back on the main trunk—

"'Twas a mercy you did not fall in again," he said in a scolding voice. "How could you be so foolish as to venture yourself out so far on that branch? You are too heavy for it."

"You would have had me leave you to drown before my eyes, Francis?"

"Drown? Pooh! If I was blundering fool enough to put us both into the water, 'tis plain I should have been left to get myself out without your interference."

And he began squeezing the water out of her dripping skirts.

"You must allow me to be glad I succeeded in fishing you up. Whatever should I be doing else alone on this tree?"

"The question is what you'll be doing now," answered he, looking ruefully at the water that streamed and eddied round their little island. "You lost the wherry while you were fishing me out. Here, sit up on this forked branch, and let me empty the water out of your shoes."

Esther did as she was bid, and while he was taking off her shoes, she began to laugh hysterically.

"Well, if ever I save your life again, Francis, to get nothing but a chiding for it!"

He laughed too.

"I don't admit you saved any of my lives, Hess, of which you well know there are nine. I should have got out by myself somehow. Yet I'll allow you behaved very handsome, and take notice I hereby thank you heartily for it, and beg to say"—he paused awkwardly—"to say there's not another young lady in London would have shown so much courage, and not fainted, or screamed, or——"

"Or in any way behaved like a woman of quality. Well, Frank, I give you up my pretensions to quality, but shall ever obstinately maintain I saved your life."

"While I shall ever as obstinately maintain the contrary," replied he gravely. "However, let us not dispute, but halloa for assistance, since the confounded wherry's gone out of reach."

They shouted together till they were out of breath, but without any result. Again and again they shouted, but no voice made reply, no figure appeared on the bank. The time went on; the September sun sloped towards the west, and the evening air blew chill across the water. Esther was herself very cold, and more anxious on her cousin's account than on her own, as he was much the more fragile of the two. But Francis seemed insensible to the cold and in the best of spirits. And the reason for this was that on the miniature desert island, where fate had cast him with Essie, and where he found himself happier than he had been for months, he had consciously entered on a new and exciting stage of his life. He was henceforth to be not the brother, but the lover of Esther and the rival of Swift. What if his rival had fame? Francis meant to

have that too some day, and he had youth on his side and true love. It would be hard if in the long run he did not drive the elderly person out of Essie's head. But however delightful he might find imprisonment on the willow, he was aware that it could hardly appear so to Esther, and was for the tenth time proposing a desperate plan of escape, when she cried out joyfully—

"Look! there comes a man."

Beyond the pool below the weir there was a flat meadow with a barn in it, and beyond the barn a green bank sloping up to a wood.

They perceived a dark figure coming quickly down the slope out of the shadow of the trees. Francis shouted, but the pedestrian heeded not the shout, for having reached the bottom of the slope, he turned and began to go up it again at the same sort of quick but awkward trot at which he had descended. Essie, alarmed at seeing him thus prepare to desert them, began in her turn to scream for help, and her shriller notes attracted the moody or deaf wayfarer's attention. He stopped, and staring about him, apparently observed the wherry floating bottom upwards, for he ran down to the water's edge. Then, as it seemed, he caught sight of the two waving handkerchiefs and clinging figures on the willow branches, for shouting in answer he disappeared among some neighbouring branches.

"It is Dr. Swift," said Essie.

"Even so," returned Francis drily.

In a few minutes Swift reappeared, on the opposite bank, looking quite pale with sympathetic terror at Esther's situation and the danger she must have run.

"O Faith, you are an awkward slutakin," he cried, "and your cousin there a confounded fool!"

The rush of the water drowned most of the words, but the last were clearly audible, and Francis, in spite of having applied a similar condemnation to himself a dozen times in the course of the last hour, smiled grimly.

Shouting out a promise of help loud enough to reach their ears, the Doctor vanished in the direction in

which he had come. Then they saw him again cross the meadow to the barn and return with a ladder over his shoulder.

It was a long, heavy ladder, but he carried it easily, coming quickly towards them at his peculiar trot.

It proved sufficient in length to make a bridge between the bank on which he stood and the trunk of the willow, but it required some nerve to cross such a bridge with the rushing stream beneath. Obviously the only safe plan was to cross on hands and knees, and Francis, setting it firmly across the trunk of the tree, began somewhat anxiously to instruct Essie how best she might cross over. But his words seemed to fall on deaf ears. For a moment she paused with her foot on the ladder and her right hand on the branch above; then, still upright, she dashed forward, and before he had time to do more then suppress an ejaculation, she was half-way across. The too elastic bridge bounded beneath her tread, as she leapt from rung to rung. The water raced giddily beneath, but her foot did not slip, and her eyes, fixed on the well-known figure on the further side, never once strayed to the stream below. Swift and straight as an arrow from the bow, she passed over, and flinging herself upon her friend burst into tears on his shoulder. Too surprised and also too moved to consider whether such an attitude was or was not compromising, Swift soothed, scolded, and comforted her with fifty quaint tender expressions, now stroking her hair, now sharply pinching her arm. Francis, who had crossed the ladder in a less impulsive manner, stood by amazed and embarrassed. He would as soon have expected to find himself in tears as his cousin. But Essie was not merely a woman, she was at bottom an excitable one; not with the easy shallow excitabilty of her mother, but with the less evident, the deeper and more dangerous excitability of a strong temperament and character. It was but a few minutes she remained so, and then she sat down on the stump of a tree, wiped her eyes, and recovered herself as suddenly as she had given way. Swift stood in front, shaking his cane.

"Plague on you, tiresome brat," he cried; "what a fright you have given me! I feel for all the world like the drabs in the street slapping their children betwixt anger and joy when they get them out safe from under the waggon-wheels. And pray, young sir," he added, turning with more genuine severity to Francis, "what excuse have *you* to offer for bringing a lady that was under your care in danger of her life, to say nothing of ruining her new damask dress; a misfortune of which she will be sensible to-morrow?"

"O, none whatever, sir," replied Francis coldly, meeting with unflinching eye a gaze which had struck awe into bosoms apparently hardier and certainly more important than his.

Esther hastened to declare herself the first to blame, and between the two, Swift was quickly in possession of the few facts of their adventure.

"But come, Hessinage," he cried, "we had best walk briskly to Lord Mordaunt's house. 'Tis not a mile from hence."

At the mention of Lord Mordaunt's name all Esther's spirit returned to her.

"No!" she cried, "I do most utterly refuse to present myself at myself at that young man's door in such a plight. Go you, Francis, and tell them to put to the horses, and meet me——Pray, dear sir, where shall he tell them to meet me?"

"O Faith, Governor Huff, yon must be reasonable! Come now to his Lordship's, and dry that draggled tail of yours, and warm your bones a little before you start for town, else you will catch a great cold."

"I care not for great colds, Doctor. I will have fifty colds rather than beg civility of that detestable fellow. Besides, 'tis already so late that if we delay there, Aunt Stone will declare she durst not for her life start for London at such an hour—she would have stayed behind at Windsor had it not been for the expense—and O! how I should hate to be perhaps the cause of our spending a night beneath Lord Mordaunt's roof!" She did not add that her mother and sister, for other reasons than Mrs. Stone's, would joyfully accept any invitation that might be extended

to the party, but Francis understood her fears, and both because he shared them, and because it was pleasant to back her wishes in opposition to Swift's, he said—

"I am of your mind, Hess, There must be some neighbouring cottage where you can dry your clothes, and if the Doctor will direct me, I can run to his Lordship's and presently bring Mrs. Vanhomrigh and the coach to fetch you."

"You are certain to do as you please, Governor, reason or no reason," returned Swift, shrugging his shoulders, "and this time, I own, you have blundered on to the better plan. The Peterborough Arms is nearer this than the Manor, and nearer the coach-road too; and so there you you shall go, and that quickly."

He took her hands to pull her up, and then began hurrying her across the field in the direction from which he had himself come. Francis came behind, somewhat mortified to find how much he was encumbered by the ladder which the Doctor, whom he was pleased to regard as advanced in years, had carried with so much ease and dexterity. But having replaced it by the barn, he started off, running up the woodland path whence Swift had first appeared, with the light foot of youth and activity. Esther and her companion struck across the fields towards the Peterborough Arms. They were glad to be alone, but more silent than when Francis was following them. A natural love of secrecy and the habits formed by another long and but half-acknowledged intimacy, made Swift almost unconsciously different in his manner to Essie when they talked together without witnesses. It was a difference so natural and so subtle as to escape definition, and not to be remembered by himself with any pang of conscience; yet the charm of it thrilled through every fibre of her being and wrapped her in a warm mist of dreams.

The great ball of the sun had now gone down, and a red fire of sunset burned half round the horizon, while opposite the moon began to glow almost as redly through the dim purple of the autumn evening. Yet

it was hardly twilight, for the sky and water were full of reflected light. The grass took a strange metallic green, and the high woods, so dark at noon, showed brown and tawny against the sunset. Essie, whose friend loved to rally her on her romantic delight in rural scenery, scarcely ventured a remark on the peculiar beauty of the evening; but it lingered in her memory as the fitting close of a day marked out from its "obscure compeers."

CHAPTER IV.

They reached the Peterborough Arms at the same moment that Francis approached the Manor House, which standing alone among the fields, was unmistakable. It was a fine Jacobean house with two square bays projecting the whole height of it, on each side of the main door. The space in front was enclosed by a cut yew hedge, but from the sloping ground above it Francis could see a coach standing there. Crossing what had once been a moat, he found his way through a maze of overgrown paths to the front door. As he issued from a lattice gate in the yew hedge, he was greeted by a shriek from the coach, in which Mrs. Stone, determined that if there was any dangerous delay it should not be through the Stone family, had been seated for the last half-hour with her daughter beside her.

"Well, Mr. Earle, here you are," cried Anna, thrusting a sharp and agitated nose out of the window. "Where the plague have you been? And, Lord, what a figure you are! We've been waiting for you this age, and half the household are seeking you."

"Indeed, miss, I'm sorry for't. I've been in the water," panted Francis, out of breath with his run, and bounding up the steps he gave a sounding rat-tat-tat on the old oaken door. As he did so it struck him that perhaps the whole affair was a dream. The wrought-iron mermaid that formed the knocker

seemed perfectly familiar to him, and so did the carved monogram and motto above the porch. As he followed the black boy who appeared at his summons through the square hall, this impression of familiarity deepened. He found the rest of the party assembled in a handsome bay-windowed parlour, drinking a stirrup-cup of burnt wine and spices. They, like the Stones, greeted him with a volley of exclamations, questions and upbraidings, that scarcely left room for his account of himself. They had not, however, long been anxious about the missing couple, whom they imagined to have passed the landing-place by a mistake easily made, as the Manor was not within sight of the river. Mrs. Vanhomrigh was not inclined to be anxious, and knowing Essie to have taken one of her unfortunate dislikes to that amiable young nobleman Lord Mordaunt, felt sure that if such had been the case neither she nor Francis would have been in a hurry to rectify their mistake. Lord Mordaunt was well-bred enough to fulfil his duties as host with a grace that cost him nothing, for he was beginning to feel a definite interest in his languid pursuit of Molly. That she would drop into his clutches one day he had no manner of doubt, but to bring that result about might cost just enough scheming to amuse him, and give a certain piquancy to the affair. So his Lordship's civil behaviour was such as to afford the Vanhomrighs an excuse for rapture, and what with walking in the grounds, drinking Bohea tea, and viewing the Dutch and Chinese curiosities with which some former occupant had stocked the house, the moments would have flown unmarked until Francis made his appearance, had it not been for Mrs. Stone. She, good lady, could not be consoled even by the society of a nobleman for the dangers of the return journey, which seemed to her to be increased by every moment of delay. Nor were her fears so ridiculous as the Vanhomrighs declared, since highwaymen were proverbially common on Hounslow Heath. Her impatient enquiries after the missing two were not, however, all prompted by self-interest, for she was really surprised at the equanimity with which

Madam Van took their unexplained disappearance, and was glad when she had succeeded in instilling enough anxiety into that lady's buoyant bosom for some of his Lordship's men to be sent to seek them. When Mrs. Vanhomrigh understood what had really happened, she was distracted with retrospective alarm, and prepared to rush off at once to the Peterborough Arms.

"But pray, mamma," said Molly, "let Francis dry his clothes first. We shall have him down with an ague, or worse, if he sits in the coach like this."

"Oh, my poor child!" cried Mrs. Vanhomrigh, at once embracing him and feeling his coat, "how do I forget thee! 'Tis true thou'rt wet and cold too, on my conscience! Quick, Ginckel! let your man get him a dry suit out of your valise."

Ginckel gave his mother a look; seldom had he felt so keenly her thoughtlessness and want of all sense of the fitness of things.

"Cousin Earle and I are scarce of a size, madam," he answered, drawing himself up to his full height, which was not very formidable. "But there is a good fire in my chamber, before which, with his Lordship's permission, he can dry himself."

"Ay, and keep me waiting till Christmas," returned she petulantly.

Francis had in truth just begun to be conscious of the chill of his wet clothes, but he was of course ready to deny the necessity for changing them, and Mrs. Vanhomrigh in her haste to be gone would have accepted the denial. Molly, however, who like Essie was still accustomed to regard him as the chief invalid of the family, was not satisfied, and Lord Mordaunt, willing to please her, took the trouble to suggest that her cousin might stay behind and subsequently join the coach on the high road by a short cut across the fields. Mrs. Vanhomrigh's leave-taking was short but effusive, and accepted with languid condescension by her host. He exerted himself so far as to wrap a scarf round Molly, and murmur in reply to her thanks for his hospitality, "Fie, dear miss, 'tis but old maid's entertainment, Bohea and civility.

Come again and try true bachelor's fare; that they say 's bread and cheese and kisses."

Francis meantime having followed the black boy up the wide oak stairs to an upper room, hurriedly divested himself of his garments, and sitting by the fire wrapped in Ginckel's embroidered bed-gown, impatiently expected their return. On the wall opposite him hung a piece of tapestry representing Adam and and Eve parleying with a Dutch Creator, who had made them solidly in his own image. Time had done much to blend the outline of the figures with the blues and greens of Eden, so that in spite of the clumsiness of the figures, the whole piece made a a pleasant bit of colour in the large bare bed-chamber. It was not, however, its decorative effect that gave it a fascination in the eyes of Francis; it was the curious train of fancies that it suggested. He not only seemed to be familiar with it, which was natural enough, since the design was not uncommon, but he had a distinct impression that if he opened the door yonder, by the great bedstead with its faded hangings, he would find himself in a narrow room, a sort of small gallery, where two similar pieces, presenting the Temptation of Eve and the Expulsion from Paradise, would hang on his right hand facing the windows. There would be an oriel at the end opposite him and a few bits of quaint Dutch marqueterie furniture along the walls. He smiled at his own delusion, but it was so strong that he rose and, at the risk of intruding on Ginckel's own man or some yet more dignified individual, opened the door of communication. The lighted sconce and the flickering fire in the bed-chamber threw but a feeble glimmer into the adjoining room, but the moon, which Essie had watched dawning so redly, now shone large and golden in the sky. It poured its beams through the ample lattices that formed one side of the gallery, and Francis, now no longer with his mind's eye, but actually, saw every object as he had conjured it up. The mechanism of memory having once been set to work, went on reproducing with inconceivable speed a thousand lost impressions. His remem-

brance of his mother was not particularly tender, but perfectly distinct. He recollected well playing round her toilette-table of a morning, while his nurse dressed her head, fingering the silver knick-knacks upon it, pulling out odd little drawers, and generally finding himself banished to jump up and down the step of an oriel window. There was the step and there the toilette-table, pushed against the wall, with its glass reflecting only the bright moonlight, and bare of its silver knick-knacks, but with the same countless drawers and inlaid bouquets of flowers which his childish fingers had too persistently picked. From the window he saw a stone terrace, a sun-dial and a fish-pond, whose images had always remained impressed upon his memory. He returned to the bed-chamber in a state of excitement. He told himself that faded memories might combine with coincidence to deceive him; this house and garden might be like, but he could not be sure that they were identical with the home of his earliest childhood; also that even if he were not mistaken in his facts, he might not be able to follow up the clue thus found, and that, moreover, if he did, his discoveries would do him no good. In vain. He was of an inquisitive and somewhat contrary disposition, and from the moment that he discovered that a mystery had been thrown round his parentage, had from time to time determined to penetrate it. Of late a hope that could he find his father he might plead with him more successfully than with the lawyer at Windsor, had given a keener edge to his curiosity.

The black boy reappeared with his clothes, and hastily enduing them, he made his way downstairs, determined to return to the place at some more convenient opportunity and question any old residents he might find in the neighbourhood. At the foot of the stairs he met a footman bearing a folded scrap of paper addressed to himself, and opening it, read in dim and scrawly characters:

"MI DEAR CHILDE,—

"You must now stay at his lordships

this nite, which he will not be at alle onwilling, for Essy's arm being somthing renched, and her as extream sicke as ever I saw her, and your Aunt Stone mitey affeared of the gentlemen of the rode, as you no, poor creeter, the kinde Dr. extends to us his orspitality and lodges us alle in Winser till tomorrer mornen, wen we shall egspect you mi deare at the signe of the Wite harte and am your loving cousin,

"ESTHER VANHOMRIGH, THE ELDER."

Francis crumpled up the note in his hand, and stood still on the last step of the stair, smiling sardonically to himself. So the little comedy he and Esther had foreseen had been acted, with a slight change of scene and personages. Probably she was better pleased with it now, but he was not. Meantime the footman also stood still, keeping an eye on him till he was recalled to a sense of his obligations. Francis began to hunt for his purse, and then suddenly asked him if he knew who had occupied the house before Lord Mordaunt's day.

"This 'ouse, m' lord, this 'ouse?" returned the man, pretending to consider the question and really watching for the appearance of the purse. He did not of course mistake this shabby-looking little gentleman for a lord, but he commonly used the title in preference to the plebeian *sir*, as showing in what society he was accustomed to wait, and as generally conducing to his own sense of dignity. The vails produced being larger than he had judged likely, he grew affable.

"Troth, your Honour," he said, "this 'ouse an't no place for people of quality. I doubt even the gentry would find it sadly too ancient to live in. I *'ave* heard his Lordship intends, when he comes of age, to pull it down and build a mansion nearer to Windsor."

"Did the late Lord Mordaunt live here?" asked Francis.

"The late Lord Mordaunt, your Honour, and the late Honourable John did both use to come here for stag-hunting and such like, when the Court was at

Windsor," returned the man, "the same as his present Lordship."

The footman pocketed his vails, and Francis continued his way to the parlour, to announce his intention not indeed of staying the night, but of walking to Windsor, where he could easily find a lodging at an inn. Lord Mordaunt, who viewed him with indifference but not dislike, civilly offered him a bed, and on his declining that, observed that he might as well wait supper, as two gentlemen were expected from the neighbourhood of Windsor, and would probably be able to give him a cast on his way in their chariot. Francis, for whom the place had a fascination, willingly accepted the latter invitation, and seeing his Lordship was in high good-humour, ventured to put some questions to him about the house and its former owners.

"The estate came to Lord Peterborough from a cousin," said his host, "and Gad! the land is worth having. As to the house," looking round him with contempt, "'tis a rare old den and half-way to Jericho. I am surprised his Lordship didn't destroy it, but the old dog knew a trick worth two of that."

It was scarcely a filial fashion of naming his parent, and he ended with a sneering laugh, but immediately afterwards left the room with some alacrity, exclaiming, "Ay, there comes Tom and Peter."

There was a sound of wheels dashing up to the door, the steps of the chariot clattered down, and there rushed into the house a torrent of youthful noise and high spirits. The hall re-echoed with loud greetings and laughter, and when the clamorous party, consisting of the two arrivals, Ginckel and Lord Mordaunt, entered the parlour, Francis was surprised to observe that the latter was contributing to the tumult. That Ginckel's mincing manners should be doffed as easily as his coat was to be expected, but the languid, silent gravity of Lord Mordaunt seemed an integral part of him. Indeed it was not an affectation. Generally speaking, ladies bored him; he had not naturally any conversation for them, and was too lazy and indifferent to invent it. The Vanhomrighs would have

been scandalised to learn that he found their society attractive partly because, being his inferiors in rank, he did not think it necessary to treat them with such ceremonious politeness as custom and surroundings enforced upon him among people of quality. This, and pretty Molly's lively tongue, which at once tickled his fancy and saved him all conversational trouble, together with the instinctive gregariousness of the idle, had caused him to drift into the company so often while the town was empty. Had they seen him in Lady Peterborough's withdrawing-room, they would have observed a difference in his manners; had they seen him among his young companions, a transformation. The two young men who preceded him were of a more commonplace type, a year or two younger than himself, rosy, and robustly built, but with a certain bloatedness of appearance which augured ill for their future comfort. Francis subsequently learned their names to be Tom Raikes and Peter Ponsonby. The whole party burst into the parlour convulsed by some rare stroke of their own humour, headed by Mr. Raikes, who, unable to let off his feelings by mere cachinnation, was mingling with it a variety of strange shrieks, and striking the air violently with his loose right hand, till the joints cracked like small pistol-shots. Ginckel, dressed in pearl-coloured cloth, with freshly-combed peruke and fine perfumed handkerchief pressed to his mouth, followed his host cackling shrilly; in the rear gleamed the grin of Tully, the black boy, who could not help adding a guttural explosion to the general roar, while the high glasses of Rhenish wine and sugar, which he carried on a massive silver salver, rattled again. Whereat his master paused abruptly in his mirth and swore at him savagely; then, "Keep your cursed throat still, you dog, and don't spill the wine." And turning to his friends: "Drink, boys, drink—you'll ne'er taste better. Old Peterborough brought it from Germany, and if his butler weren't a better friend to me than he is, you'd never ha' seen the colour of it this night."

As the wine went round—a wine whose bouquet it

would have drawn tears from a connoisseur to divine through the cloying sugar—Mr. Earle was named to the new guests. The introduction was so cursory it formed no interruption to the series of whoops, laughs and oaths, whereby the ball of conversation was kept flying, while the wine was being despatched. Just as the ball had dropped, Tom Raikes, who lay in a chair with his hat over his eyes and was drumming on the table with the foot of his glass, started it afresh by suddenly slapping his knee, and doubling up in a fresh convulsion of merriment.

"O Lord! O Lord, the parson! That's what I ha'n't forgot!" he shrieked; "never bammed a fellow so neatly in all my days. Mordaunt, lad, Mordaunt! the parson leaping for a guinea with his plaguey petticoats tucked up across his arm!"

"Ay, ay," joined in Ponsonby, with a burst of exultant imprecations, "'twas the rarest trick of the deal. Lord, the fellow's phiz, when I says to Tom quite quiet—'Tom, smoke the Bishop at the window'—just like that I says it. Didn't I, Tom?"

"Ay, and then," continued Tom, throwing up his hat and catching it again, "if the dirty fellow didn't dispute the vardi and make as though he'd keep his guinea; but I promise you I had it out of him, though 'twas dearer than blood."

"Well done, my lad!" cried Mordaunt. "Trust a parson for sticking to his money, and you for getting it out of him!" He reflected with some bitterness on the guinea he himself had sacrificed to the cloth that day. "But you won't make your fortin out of leaping with parsons, three leaps a guinea."

"And devilish dear at the price," observed Peter.

"'Tis true, if he don't make it, he won't lose it neither," sneered Mordaunt. "You take my advice and stick to the beggarly parsons, Tom, lest heavy in the purse prove light in the leg."

"Ha! ha! that's pure! Smoke that, Tommy!" cried Peter; and all laughed except Mr. Raikes, who sat up and swore with dignity. He was a short-legged, fat young man, whose appearance entirely belied his boasted agility.

"Pray divert yourselves, gentlemen," he said, after devoting his companions piecemeal to perdition, "but I'll lay you, Mordaunt, and you, Ponsonby, and Van there, and Mr. What-d'ye-call, if he be no parson, a hundred pounds apiece, I beat you all at three leaps each—two of you o' Monday, and two o' Tuesday, meet when you will. I'll lay 'em and win 'em too, gentlemen—lay 'em and win 'em too."

"No, hang me, not of me!" exclaimed Lord Mordaunt. "Leap! Why the deuce should I leap? If it had to be done, I'd make my nigger do it. Go to Bedlam, Tom, and leap for a hundred straws."

"Well said, Mordaunt," cried Ponsonby. "I love a wager, but for sport I'd a precious deal sooner put my money on four legs than on two."

"What, *all* affeared?" jeered Tom, feeling it safe to assume a swagger. "Come, Colonel, come now, when will you meet?"

"If I may dance for't, Tommy," replied the Colonel, taking snuff and smiling with the indulgence of the elder man and the acknowledged beau, "let it be at the next Birthday. Leaping, I take it, 's for country putts. Yet here's Mr. Earle, who's been swimming, ha! ha! to-day, and for aught I know may love leaping as well."

He felt some mortification at the unexpected presence at their select party of Francis in his camlet suit, somewhat shabby to start with and the worse for the water, and his own draggled brown hair. So he at the same time disclaimed any close connection with him, and took revenge for the unavoidable one of which he was conscious.

"Hey, Mr. Earle, sir, what do you say?"

"I say that my legs never yet carried the weight of a hundred pounds, save of my own fool's flesh."

This candid confession of poverty, confirmed by the speaker's appearance, emboldened Mr. Raikes.

"I care not," he said. "Say ten and done, and meet me o' Monday with the gentlemen here for judges."

Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"Pardon me, Mr. Raikes, but I have other fish to fry."

"A plague on you, sir. You shall not get off thus," cried Raikes insolently, kicking off his shoes. "Mordaunt, let Tully bring a cane, and we'll e'en leap here before supper. If the door be opened there'll be room and to spare."

Then he came up to his adversary and made as if he would pull off his coat. Francis, with his hands in his pockets, persisted in declining the invitation. Mr. Raikes now took him round the body and began dragging him towards the middle of the room. This was horse-play of a kind vastly to amuse the assistants, and they roared again, encouraging the struggling pair in the choicest language of the cock-pit.

"Gad! Mr. Earle," said his Lordship, "don't cross poor Tom. You shall leap and not risk a penny, for I'll put ten guineas on you myself, just for the sport on't."

"Ay! so will I," cried Ponsonby with many asservations.

Francis' blood was now thoroughly up; he jerked himself free from Raikes' grasp, leaving his coat in the enemy's hands.

"Deuce take your guineas, gentlemen!" he said. "Lay 'em where you please. I'll leap against Mr. Raikes for nothing, and if I don't beat him first leap, I'll engage to leap again for any stake he may name. But you must let me place the cane as I choose."

"Done," cried Tom. "Done, Mordaunt, and done, Peter! The odds are even." And he threw off his coat, and bounded awkwardly several times into the air.

Now Mr. Raikes' belief in his own agility was one of those strong delusions that are sometimes sent upon young men—from the gods, as we must suppose, since they have no apparent origin in this world. The laziness of the youths of fashion with whom he consorted, and the awkwardness of the unlucky parson before mentioned, had encouraged his conceit, and as in the casual struggle that had just taken place his weight had given him the advantage over his slender antagonist, he imagined himself sure of victory and twenty guineas. But

though a sturdy, he was also a clumsy, self-indulgent young man, quite unfit to contend in such a sport with one of active and temperate habits. Francis, having quickly appropriated two small ombre tables, began piling folios out of the bookshelf. He piled up his edifice silently and savagely to the utmost height that he thought he could clear, and then placed across it the bamboo provided by Tully. The others looked on at his arrangements.

"Lord! you must be meaning to run under it," observed Ponsonby, who began to tremble for his guineas. Tom meantime was busy taking out the half-ell of black ribbon that tied his shirt in order to tie back his peruke. He stared at Francis' preparations, but concluding them to be part of the bravado of despair, followed him out of the door. The others pressing close to the door-way, looked eagerly down the dimly-lighted bit of corridor and hall along which they were to run. Francis came first. Rage at the species of baiting to which he had been subjected, and perhaps the fumes of the Rhenish in his blood, made him feel as if he had wings on his heels. The moment he started a satisfied smile began to dawn on the faces of his two backers who were shrewd enough where their money was concerned. It broadened and broke into a short laugh of gratification as he passed them, and flying clean over the bamboo with two inches to spare, came down lightly but firmly on the polished boards beyond.

A minute afterwards Raikes blundered by, all arms and legs, made a desperate bound and plunge, and fell prone under a table and an avalanche of folios; for, whether purposely or not, Francis had so arranged the cane that it did not, as might have been expected, fly at the first touch of an indiscreet toe.

Such an accident happening to any one would have seemed a good joke enough to the three spectators, but happening as it did to their particular crony Tom, their delight knew no bounds. Besides there was the money involved. The shrill cackle of Ginckel Mordaunt's grating laugh, and Ponsonby's younger and heartier hilarity broke out in a simultaneous roar

over the prostrate form of their companion, Francis, with an impassive face, began to put on his waistcoat. Raikes, his natural clumsiness increased by wrath and disappointment, struggled for some minutes on the slippery well-waxed boards before he could get to his feet, and then stood glaring savagely round, his peruke all awry.

"Egad, my Lord, he's going to eat us without salt or pepper!" cried Peter, pointing at him.

"I'll carve ye to begin with, at any rate," replied Raikes, and swearing an oath or two, considered whom first he should devour. Then he took up a sword that lay on the table, and approaching Lord Mordaunt with a truculent air—

"Demme, my Lord," said he, "you may refuse a leaping engagement, but there's meetings no gentleman or nobleman either can refuse."

His Lordship became suddenly grave.

"Come, Raikes," said he, drawing him into the embrasure of the window, "don't let's drive a jest too far. Deuce take thee, man! whose notion was the leaping but thine own? Sure," he continued, lowering his voice, "'tis but reasonable these sort of rascals, that must earn their living by their heads or their heels, should have some advantage over men of quality." And again raising his voice, "You was obstinate to do it, my lad, but anyone could see you was not in good jumping trim to-day. An't that so, Van?"

The Colonel and Ponsonby, though surprised at Mordaunt's unwonted conciliatoriness, followed his lead. Tom was pacified as quickly as he had been roused, and when supper had begun to warm his heart by way of his stomach, he solemnly pledged Francis across the table.

"You beat me handsomely, sir," he said. "Demme, I own it. You may go boast you beat Tom Raikes of Morley, and, 'pon honour, there's not many could say that much."

"Sir, you flatter me," replied Francis gravely, bowing over his glass.

Ponsonby was also grave, and kept fixing a considering eye on the obscure youth. Two days before

he had lost a valuable race-horse, by name Ramillies, and in spite of his avowed preference for placing his money on four legs rather than on two, he was not in a mood to throw away any chance. Accustomed, like Raikes, to the society of lazy fine gentlemen, young Earle's leaping powers seemed to him much more remarkable than they really were. It occurred to him that a partnership between capital and labour, as personated by himself and Mr. Earle, might be of service to both, and so much was he taken with his idea, that no polite retort of Francis' would shake him loose from it. Lord Mordaunt, however, who was a youth of some discrimination, at length intervened.

"Don't be tedious, Peter. The gentleman knows well enough there an't no money in your concerns. Faith, but I was in luck to have nothing on your Ramillies! Was your eggs all in one basket, or will you ride to Datchet races with Tom and me next week?"

"Shall we have the diversion of meeting your Lordship's Papa?" asked Ponsonby, and laughed.

Tom laughed louder, and brought an imaginary cane whistling through the air and down on some solid object. The reference was to a little episode that had taken place at the New Market two years before, when Lord Mordaunt had unexpectedly encountered his father on the race-course and had been peremptorily forbidden to return thither till he should be of age. This time Lord Mordaunt looked with disgust on the mirth of his companions.

"Lord Peterbrow," he said indifferently, "starts for Spain to-morrow. Where he'll be next week is more than any man can tell."

"Well, well," said Vanhomrigh, holding up his glass, "I hope I may without offence drink the noble traveller's voyage to that land—what does the play call it?—that land 'from which no traveller returns.'" Mordaunt smiled disagreeably, but made no remark.

"A—men," cried Tom in a sepulchral voice, seizing a bottle. "And bumpers all round."

And the two young guests who sat at the opposite

side of the table to the Colonel and Francis waved their glasses vociferously in the direction of a portrait which faced them, and which Francis gathered from their exclamations to be that of Lord Peterborough, though its position, behind him and beyond the light of the candles on the table, prevented his seeing it clearly.

When the enthusiasm of the toast had subsided—"Who's the nymph?" asked Ponsonby, pointing with his glass to another portrait in the same direction. "Hang me, if I can see her!"

"That an't your loss," replied Mordaunt. "She's no beauty, for all the painter could do. What's her name, Tom? Lord! how should I know? I call her Peterbrow's Folly."

He went on between oaths and ill words to explain that the nameless nymph had in some long past time been placed by Lord Peterborough in this house; that at the caprice of the fantastic lady it had been filled with the valuable Chinese curiosities which Lord Mordaunt had that afternoon been exhibiting to his visitors. That Lord Peterborough should have wasted on his own amusement sums, which otherwise might have now been profitably used in extending his son's, naturally moved the indignation of Lord Mordaunt and his companions.

That double consciousness, which is latent in everyone, plays an exceptionally large part in the mind of the lover. The thought of the beloved is imminent in all other thoughts, and continually tends to develop and overpower them. The image of Esther had never been absent from Francis' consciousness that evening, and now appeared as a definite comment on what was passing around him. From the mental vision of that countenance he looked with disgust and contempt on Ginckel's profile next him—so irritating in its likeness to his sister's—agape and thrust forward to form one of a group of faces, all in different proportions degraded by low and vinous merriment, and with nothing of youth left in them but its weakness. This was the Colonel who, in St. James' Street, gave himself the airs of the

superior male creature, guardian and protector, and when in his most unselfish mood, schemed to secure even such a one as himself as a husband for Molly or Esther. In spite of jealousy, Francis could not but feel it a satisfaction to picture the three ladies at a distance, in a quiet little parlour at Windsor, probably rallying Dr. Swift and Mr. Lewis over coffee and oranges. The contrast came indeed as something of a relief to jealousy. He had said to himself before, and now repeated with more conviction, that since this was the type of man whom Ginckel brought to St. James' Street, it was no wonder that Esther, who was not so blind as her mother, turned with enthusiasm to the society and even to the worship of Swift and his friends. But it was a considerably greater satisfaction to return in fancy to the willow, to stand close to the branch on which Essie sat, and to dispute with her whether or not she had saved him from death by drowning. He was recalled from this pleasant excursion by two dark objects flying over his head, their simultaneous thud against the picture behind him being greeted by yells of delight from three of the company. He started angrily, but soon perceived that the shots were not directed at him. Lord Mordaunt, who was never quite hurried off his feet by any excitement, and was also of an orderly disposition, was annoyed at the bombardment of what he knew to be a valuable possession.

"Curse you, fellows!" he said, with a sudden change of voice and manner. "If you want a mark to cast greasy dumplings at, take Tully there into the garden. You won't spoil *his* beauty, and if you did, he an't worth so much money as the hussy yonder, who had herself painted by the best master in the Hague."

"Oddso, man! how tetchy you turn, when we did it out of pure friendship to your Lordship," cried Peter.

"Tully," continued Mordaunt, "take a light and rub the grease off yonder picture with your handkerchief. Look alive, and be hanged to you!"

The negro took one of the heavy silver candlesticks off the table, and putting it on the floor near him, climbed laboriously on to a high oak stool to accomplish the task. The flickering flame glittered on his silver dog-collar and beady eyes, but did not enable him to see the marks on the picture. Francis good-naturedly rose and lifted the candle. As he did so from the darkness of the recess where the picture hung, and from out the yet deeper darkness of its background, his mother's face looked on him—not tenderly, but as it had been used to smile in life, subtly and mockingly. The curious pale long-eyed face was not in the least like any other he had ever seen. The feeling of mingled fear and fascination, with which he had regarded her as a child, returned upon him, and the candle shook in his hand, as addressing Lord Mordaunt with a dazed look—

"What was her name, did you say?" he stammered.

His Lordship stared.

"I said, hang me if I knew," he replied. "And I'll trouble you, sir, not to spill my wax on my nigger's silk stockings."

Attention was then called to poor Tully's dumb contortions of person and countenance—it is to be feared his concern was rather for his own legs than for his master's silk stockings—and they gave rise to fresh mirth.

"Gad! I forgot to tell you the end of the story," continued Mordaunt when silence was restored, "and yet 'twas the best of it. The witch there was burnt to death, luckily for us, before she had sucked the last guinea out of old Peterbrow. *He's* never been near the place since, but they say you may meet *her* in the gallery any night of the week. So I wish you joy of her company, Van."

The Colonel smiled a sickly smile.

"She was burnt to death," Lord Mordaunt had said. Francis had a recollection of waking one morning to a house full of strange confusion and whispered horror, and he had gathered that his mother had died in some sudden and shocking way, but

till this moment he had not known how. He lifted the light up to the portrait opposite hers, which he knew to be Lord Peterborough's ; this revived a much less distinct memory, yet one not wholly obliterated. So at last by chance he had picked up the key to the mystery, which he had so often tried to solve. He dropped into his chair, and passed his hand across his eyes like one giddy. Lord Mordaunt glanced at him and taking him to be overcome with wine, made no remark, but was reminded thereby that if business was to be done that evening, it was time to leave off passing the bottle. He rose abruptly and marshalled his somewhat unwilling company back to the parlour in which they had first met. The spirits of his three comrades were not sobered even by the sight of the card-tables prepared there. Tom Raikes had begun again to make strange cracking noises with his fingers, which admired accomplishment Ponsonby and Vanhomrigh were vainly endeavouring to imitate. This was not the kind of sport in which Mordaunt ever took an active part, and now he looked on with a frown of impatience.

"Come, gentlemen, what's your game?" he asked. "Lu, or five-handed Ombre?"

"My Lord, I do not play," said Francis.

His Lordship accepted the statement with an indifferent nod. Yet it was an extraordinary one in an age when cards were the common passion of all ages and both sexes. In any other young man it would have argued something like heroism to have made it in such company, but it cost Francis no effort to take his own line in such matters. Had the vice of gambling been less ordinary, it might, in spite of his common sense, have had temptations for him. As it was, the sordid side of it lay continually open to those critical observations which it was his pleasure to make on things in general. His mind was still in the state of excitement caused by his unexpected discovery, but it was now a calm and luminous excitement, in which the images of things and people presented themselves to him with extreme clearness and meaning, without interrupting the

course of an inward debate as to his action or inaction, which he felt to be of immediate importance —for was not Lord Peterborough starting for Spain next morning? The reverence for mere bonds of blood was still strong in that generation, and the conviction that Mordaunt was his brother gave that heretofore rather indifferently despised young man a sudden interest for him.

For Mordaunt the silent youth at the fireplace behind him had ceased to exist. He was seated at the card-table. Tully had removed his peruke and was tying a silk handkerchief round his head in lieu thereof. In obedience to his impatiently repeated summons, the others came to the table, and after a dispute as to what game they should play, began drawing for places in the new game of Quadrille, which all but his Lordship preferred to the true Ombre, as requiring fewer wits in the player. When the dealer and the partners, the stakes and the number of *tours*, were determined, "'Tis you and I, Van," said his Lordship, "so don't let's have any of your Beastings."

Which was as much as to say, "Don't let us have any of your mistakes."

The Colonel flushed a bright pink, and reached a card to mark the *tours* with before he answered.

"Pooh! my Lord, you think my play ruined by the ladies, but I warrant my ruin is of another guess fashion. The chattering baggages know neither mercy nor honour, and when they have luck, love to call a king."

Expression of reprobation passed round the table, though the Colonel himself was notorious for playing this risky and selfish game, by which the player breaks partnership and plays for his own hand. Lord Mordaunt and Vanhomrigh were formidable opponents for the two other young men, and the game now began in earnest, all attempts at talk being sternly checked by the host.

Every face at the table wore a look of intense and more or less ignoble concentration. Lord Mordaunt's clear-cut features showed themselves to the spectator

at the fire, now profile, now three-quarters, against the flame of a wax-candle beyond, stripped of their usual expression of haughty indifference as entirely as of their shadowing curls, and sharpened by attentive anxiety. The drooping lids were lifted from the dark eyes, the fine lips lengthened and straightened by the clench of the jaw, and the whole face looked older by ten years and strangely mean, in spite of the beauty of its outline. There was a cold, keen eagerness about it, a nameless something, as though some devil of remorseless egoism, usually lurking in the shadow and mystery of the human heart, had suddenly and shamelessly stepped into the light. Francis, surveying his new-found brother with a critical eye, smiled in scorn of womankind, when he thought of the praises that Mrs. Vanhomrigh, the looks and blushes that Molly lavished on this bad-hearted young man. Yet, alas! their mistake was more worthy of pity than of scorn. The world provides the regulation domino and mask for every frequenter of its masquerade, and it is less often the wise than the ill-natured who are swift to divine ugly shapes behind them.

At first the game went, as might have been expected, in favour of the two more experienced players, but the others took their losses with good temper, if not cheerfuness. Against luck, however, no skill can stand. When it came to Mordaunt's turn to be the Ombre, or player, he surveyed his hand with a glance as keen and swift as that with which his father would have reviewed a regiment of recruits, and cried "Pass" immediately. When it came round to the Colonel again, they lost Codille.

"I'll trouble you not to draw my Basto next *tour* with your cursed Manille," observed his partner in a voice as sharp and cold as a steel knife-edge.

The next *tour* found the Matadors yet more against them, and they lost heavily. Raikes and Ponsonby, heaping up the mils and fishes which marked the score, dared scarcely indulge their satisfaction even by looks, so black the silence that brooded over the table, broken only by an occasional oath from Mor-

daunt at his cards or at his partner. At length Ponsonby, putting down his card, cried "Gano" to his partner, as a request to him not to take it. Mordaunt dashed his cards on to the table, and shooting out his right arm suddenly, presented the finger like a pistol at Ponsonby's breast,

"Beasted, Peter!" he exclaimed, with a short laugh.

Peter also dashed down his cards and swore indignantly. On this there arose a clamour as great as can be made by four gentlemen all talking together, and each bent on making his imprecations, if not his arguments, audible. For Quadrille being yet in its infancy, the rule which forbade the call for Gano was not fully established, and the two winners were by no means willing to reduce their winnings by paying the fine demanded.

While the rest of the company were thus intent upon their own affairs, Francis Earle left the room and the house unobserved.

CHAPTER V.

Outside the night was cool and exquisitely silent, for there was no sound, except that of the faint breeze sighing through the treetops. Below them it was pitch dark, as the moon had gone behind a cloud, and the foliage was still very thick. A long avenue of beeches ran across the fields to the house, and down this Francis began to make his way, in accordance with the directions given him when he had been intended to join the coach. But he experienced the usual difficulty in walking straight in the dark, and as he knocked his hat off against a branch, and first one shoulder and then the other against the boles of the trees, and tripped and strayed among the brambles and thorn bushes that had been allowed to encroach on the avenue, he felt not indeed a temptation to return, but exceeding wrath against his inanimate and invisible foes, and something like despair of

ever reaching his destination. He would probably have wandered yet longer in this wilderness, and hopelessly missed the high-road, had it not been for a fortunate accident. A bonfire of weeds and the stubbed-up roots of trees near the path having smouldered itself hollow, the top fell in just as Francis passed, and a red genial tongue of flame shot up into the darkness. There was something at once strange and friendly in the fire, crackling and glowing through the night, alone in the deserted field. It lighted up a footpath that crossed the avenue and a stile in the hedge, which he must otherwise have overlooked, but which he recognised as his right way. On the open path it was not so dark as under the trees, and the ripples of light at the edge of the dun cloud that hid the moon were broadening and brightening. As he crossed another stile at the further end of the way, she swam out again into the clear sky, and he saw the white high-road stretching left and right between the dark lines of its hedges. He turned in the direction, not of Windsor, but of London, with the regular determined tramp of a man settling down to work, for he had more than twenty miles to cover before morning. He did not know the country, but he felt sure that the high-road must bring him right eventually. In the first village street he came to, though the other houses were all dark, a stream of light came from the ale-house door, and he asked if this were the coach-road to London. The landlord nodded an answer, and he and one or two belated men round the door stared with much solemnity and suspicion at the lonely pedestrian, and would have questioned him in their turn had he not disappeared again into the darkness before they could arrive at articulation.

He met no other foot-passengers and only one post-chaise passed him, driving very quickly. In the day-time it was a busy road, for besides the scattered towns and villages upon it, he passed the gates of large villas, which the wealthier merchants and many of the nobility preferred as summer residences to country places at a distance from London. But

now these dark and silent houses, withdrawn among their gardens and trees, seemed rather to emphasise than to lessen the loneliness of the way. As he passed the scattered groups of thorns on Hounslow Heath he kept his hand on his sword, but if any highwaymen were lurking there, so insignificant a prey did not tempt them. Below him the river flats by Hammersmith lay shimmering white with mist in the moonlight. Before he reached them the moon was gone, but from time to time the roll of a market cart, and the gleam of its sleepy lantern came to him cheerfully through the darkness.

He entered London when the oil lamps in the streets were burning even paler than before in the cheerless dawn. In St. James' Street no one was yet stirring, and it was only a prolonged volley of knocks that at length brought Mrs. Ann, the Vanhomrighs' own woman, to the door. The old waiting-maid threw up her hands in horror at the apparition of Francis, thinking he brought ill-news of her ladies. She was greatly relieved at finding that it was his own business that brought him to town, and inclined to pity and make much of him. He certainly looked wayworn, and felt tired when he sat down, but not sleepy. On the contrary, he had a curious feeling as though something were strained right across his brain, and he would never be able to close his eyes again. He dressed himself afresh with consideration, not indeed achieving an appearance that would have made the Colonel proud to acknowledge him, but freeing himself for the moment from the reproach of a scholarly slovenliness of dress. Then he took down from the wall a small Spanish sword which was his oldest possession. Something on the embroidered scabbard or belt to which it was attached had caught his childish fancy, and as he had not been able to draw it, he had been allowed to keep it as a cherished toy. He then sat down by a cheerful fire which Mrs. Ann had lighted, drank the dish of chocolate she brought him, and read a book till a quarter to eight o'clock, when he went out and turned across St. James' Park in the direction of Peterborough House. On his way

he arranged what he should say when he got there; for even twice his years teach few of us the futility of such one-sided plans of conversation, where no allowance is made for the winds and tides of our own immediate impressions, still less for the independent and constraining force of another mind. He marched stoutly on till he came in sight of the big door with the two shallow steps before it and the oil-lamps on each side. Then for the first time he realised to how audacious a course he was about to commit himself, and not so much hesitated as encouraged himself, by weighing the risk and the possible loss and gain resulting from it. He could but lose the slender allowance which eked out his Bible-clerkship at All Souls, and the chance of a chaplaincy or a living, neither of which he would care to accept. On the other hand, there was the irrepressible youthful hope that this famous father, himself so ambitious and so restless, might have more sympathy with the restlessness and ambition of his son than the dry little lawyer at Windsor. Should his lordship fly into a rage, Francis would but have to retire, and he imagined himself retiring discreetly under cover of a smart repartee. He knocked at the door, and a large butler in a large peruke, who regarded him with awe-inspiring surprise, informed him, as he expected, that Lord Peterborough was shortly leaving for Madrid, and would see no one except on special business. But he stepped past the butler into the flagged hall with an easy confidence which sent that individual's ideas, that like his majestic frame usually moved with measured dignity, jostling each other in hopeless confusion.

"His lordship will see *me*," said the unknown and apparently insignificant person, and would not vouchsafe his name.

Now Lord Peterborough, like some other noblemen and politicians in those days, when the succession of the House of Hanover seemed daily more doubtful, had grown tired of that uncertain seat called in modern phraseology "the fence," and was engaged in getting off it on the Stuart side. Conse-

quently he received a good many mysterious or shabby visitors.

He was one of those irritable masters who expect their servants to know by instinct whom they wish and whom they do not wish to see, and the butler knew not whether he would incur most wrath by admitting, or by sending away, one who might be a political emissary of the highest importance or a needy tradesman bringing a bill. Meantime, in mere confusion of mind he began to mount the stairs, closely followed by Francis. On the landing, still as far from having arrived at a conclusion as ever, he turned and faced his pursuer like a sheep at bay.

"You must please to tell me your name and business, your Honour, before I can admit you to his Lordship," he said with attempted firmness.

"Neither concern you, my good man," replied Francis, shrugging his shoulders with a gentle but superior smile; "you may say, the gentleman from Lord Mordaunt."

The butler opened a door slowly and wide to give himself time to collect his thoughts, but not succeeding in doing so, announced in loud and pompous tones from the force of habit, "My Lord, the gentleman from Lord Mordaunt."

"Mordaunt!" cried a sharp, surprised voice from far within the room; then after a pause, "well, let him wait."

The butler closed the door gradually, looking in a doubtful, almost appealing way at Francis, who had walked past him and stood in the small ante-chamber divided by folding-doors, which were open, from the large room beyond. Within he could see the back of a man in a neat travelling wig and a military coat, seated at a desk and writing fast with one hand, while with the other he from time to time conveyed a tea-cup or food to his lips.

Now did Francis begin somewhat to quake, finding himself in the very presence of Lord Peterborough, though as yet unobserved by him. Here was the man of glittering reputation, of whose bold genius for war, of whose adventurous feats of daring, he had

heard a thousand stirring tales from men who had fought in Spain; here was the "Mordanto," whose cosmopolitan activity had been chronicled in verse by Swift himself, whom the Tory party—at the Vanhomrighs Tories predominated—lauded to the skies as the worthy rival of Marlborough; the hero of a day on whom Time had not yet clearly written *mene, mene, tekel.* Had his new-discovered father been a more ordinary individual, Francis would not have dreamed of thus claiming him, but a consciousness of something unusual in his own aims and abilities made him instinctively trust this unusual man to recognize in him at once no ordinary claimant for money or social recognition. This consciousness at least buoyed him up till he found himself left there to watch the dark curls of Lord Peterborough's wig vibrating, as he could almost have imagined, to the quick working of the brain within, and to listen to the scratch-scratch of his somewhat unruly quill. The quill having become totally unmanageable, his Lordship pitched it into the fireplace, and turned round sharply to reach another from a table behind him. Then, to his surprise, for he supposed he was alone, he found himself face to face with a small young man, who stood with his back against the well-filled bookshelf in the ante-room, meeting his Lordship's eye with a look at once earnest and abashed.

"Well, sir," said Lord Peterborough sharply, "what d'ye want?" and added a muttered curse on the butler.

The young man stepped forward and bowed, still earnestly regarding him, but did not immediately answer. So he answered himself.

"Ah! the gentleman from Lord Mordaunt, to be sure," and he smiled grimly. "I presume the affectionate creature sends me his blessing before I sail—and would be glad of a thousand pounds."

"Possibly, my Lord," replied the young man in a deliberate if somewhat hesitating manner. "But I was not sent by Lord Mordaunt."

Lord Peterborough's restless emaciated fingers drummed on the chair-back.

"You announced yourself as from my son!"

There was a short pause before Francis answered with ingenuousness, rather than boldness—

"My Lord, that was a lie; I don't usually lie."

His Lordship stared at his singular interlocutor, and then throwing himself back in his chair, laughed silently. But quickly regaining his countenance—

"Then who the deuce are you?" he asked.

Francis paused again before replying: "I came here to ask your Lordship that. My mother's name was Frances Annesley."

Every glimmer of amusement died out of Peterborough's face. "Ah," he said, "I perceive."

Then he filliped at some stray grains of sand on the document upon which he was engaged, and finding them still there, took it up and brushed them off.

"Upon my honour, young gentleman," he continued coldly, without raising his eyes from his task, "you have indulged a most idle curiosity. I have no objection to gratify it; but you will get no money from me, which is, I suppose, what you want."

At these words a change also passed over Francis' manner and expression.

"Money!" he cried, "money! Oh, your Lordship may be easy. If you indeed be the man I think, I came to inform you that such moneys as you have paid towards making a parson of me are paid for stark nothing, and if 'tis true, as Mr. Wilson affirms, that you will give 'em for that and nothing but that, why, I hereby sacrifice my interest in 'em freely to your Lordship, and have the honour to wish you a good-morning."

This was not in the least what he had intended to say, but the most meditated stroke of art would hardly have been so successful as this unpremeditated outburst of anger.

Peterborough looked at him curiously and relaxed into something approaching a smile.

"Foolish boy! 'Tis a handsome offer. Another might take advantage of thee. Were it handsomer, I should do so myself. But let us talk of it, since I do not leave for Madrid till dinner-time, and"—look-

ing at his watch—"'tis not yet half after eight. Yet,' he added, with a glance of renewed suspicion, "I am very likely a fool not to kick you downstairs."

Nor would the certainty that the young man was his own son have deterred him from doing so, had he not begun to feel an amused interest in the creature, and to observe in him a strong likeness to himself, and yet more to his late promising son, John. He had lost his two eldest sons in one year, and though far from a domestic character, he had been affected, both in his affections and in his parental pride, by the death of the second, a distinguished naval officer; especially as that loss brought him face to face with his youngest son, whom heretofore Lady Peterborough had been left to spoil at her ease.

At this direct summons to speak, Francis was silent, and his first awe returned upon him, while Peterborough, who seemed never for an instant without movement in some part of his face or person, rose from the escritoire and went to the fireplace.

"Come, come, boy," he cried impatiently, turning the poker round and round in the flame, for there was a fire in the grate. "If you be Mrs. Annesley's son, you must have a tongue in your head. Why will you not be a parson? 'Tis no bad trade for one that has wit and knows how to use it."

"Say, abuse it, my Lord. To lick a trencher better than a lacquey, and spoil a good poem with a vile dedication."

"Pooh, pooh! You talk like friend Swift in a fit of the spleen," returned Peterborough, still amused and laughing.

"Dr. Swift would confirm me that 'tis an ill trade for one that is ambitious and would be honest."

"But Swift is honest, ay, and imprudent too!" cried Peterborough. "Yet look what his mere wit hath got for him."

"Promises," returned Francis drily. Peterborough, being among the very few persons in the secret of Swift's unstable position and the obstacles between him and promotion, silently congratulated the youth on his penetration, not guessing that it was quickened

by jealousy. "But I care not," Francis continued. "The richest Bishopric in England could not tempt me to be a parson."

"You are a fool," returned Peterborough impatiently, moving from the fire, "but what is that to me? Wilson shall have instructions to continue your pittance and let you go your own ways; though I cannot guess what this monstrous ambition of yours may be, that leads you to despise a fat fellowship and the chance of a fat living."

Francis laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, and meeting the famous soldier's eyes with an earnest look, "I know not whether my ambition be monstrous, my Lord," he said, "but I am sure 'tis great, for I aspire to use this sword, that once belonged to the hero of Barcelona, in such fashion that the world may say I am worthy to be his son, if I am not so."

As a diplomatist, and a man of wit and fashion, Peterborough had acquired for occasions the cool polish of exterior then, perhaps even more than now, thought indispensable to the *rôle*. But the native impulsiveness beneath it, the impulsiveness which at once made and marred him as a general and a politician, constantly broke through to the surface. The frank young homage of this unknown lad with the strangely familiar face, at once flattered his vanity and touched what remained of his heart. He stepped forward and set his hands on Francis' shoulders. Their eyes were on a level, and as they met, Peterborough's emaciated features, worn with the ceaseless pursuit of pleasure and ambition, flushed and softened with a smile that made him for a moment look like the young man's brother.

"Come," he said, "I will trust you with the truth. If your mother was really Mrs. Annesley, then you are really my son, and methinks the best one I am like to find now-a-days."

Francis had a tongue nimble enough in many respects, but in others exceedingly lame. He was surprised and touched by Lord Peterborough's admission and the manner of it, but he only looked down, coloured, and said nothing. Peterborough drew the

youth's sword from the scabbard, and examined it, blade and hilt.

"So thou would'st be a soldier?" he said, after a pause. "Well, 'tis a secret I trust to your discretion, but I intend landing in the Netherlands on my way to Spain. If you are in earnest, I will leave you there with a gentleman that shall get you a permit to serve with the allied troops, though I cannot promise you a commission or to see more than the end of the game."

"My Lord, I am infinitely obliged. At what hour shall I attend your Lordship?" asked Francis.

The calmness with which he accepted the sudden proposal to leave his native country and assume a totally new position in life within the next few hours, gave Lord Peterborough extreme satisfaction.

"Be here at four o'clock," he said, "bringing no more than a portmantel. I hate baggage. You shall be equipped for the camp at the Hague. I do not promise great things, mind you, but you shall have just as much as suffices to give a young man credit enough to run into debt. Now farewell. If you come not at the hour I shall know you repent—and so shall I."

He extended his hand to Francis, who kissed it respectfully and made his way downstairs, almost stunned by the unlooked-for success of his future.

As to Lord Peterborough, of course as soon as he heard the big front door close behind Francis, he called himself a fool for thus negligently exposing himself to claims and annoyances which he had for fifteen years successfully taken precautions to avoid. But he was reaching an age when the most active and hardened of men occasionally feel the pangs of solitariness. His wandering and profligate life had long and hopelessly alienated Lady Peterborough's affections from him, and his relations with his surviving son were extremely unpleasant. The sincere and admiring, but not very profound, liking entertained for him by certain literary men was the best thing left to him in a life of private and political intrigue which, generally speaking, occupied his energies too

completely to leave room for anything else. Yet from time to time some indication of failing health brought before him the chill vision of a solitary old age. If he can be said to have loved any woman in the course of his life, that woman was Frances Annesley. Cold, unprincipled, and with little beauty, she had by her wit and that strange gift of fascination which defies analysis, retained her power over him for seven years. At the end of that time they had had a quarrel, in the course of which he had knocked a lighted candle off the table, which, falling on her dress, set her on fire and caused her death. His heart was not very soft nor his sensibilities very keen, but this horrible accident made a real and disagreeable impression upon him, and he hastened to try and efface it. If Mrs. Annesley had been interested in her child, she might long before have had him well provided for, but the plain sickly boy was an object of indifference to her, and when Lord Peterborough shut up the Manor, he instructed Mr. Wilson to make a small allowance for the child's maintenance and have him brought up in ignorance of his parentage. This he did partly to avoid annoyance, and partly to enable him the more completely to forget the episode of Mrs. Annesley. He was now not quite sure whether he was glad or sorry the seal of secrecy had been broken, in some way as yet unexplained. He said to himself that the youth would undoubtedly prove ungrateful, extortionate and the cause of infinite annoyance to him, and yet—— Then, as next day must see him through the delicate business of tampering with some of Marlborough's officers in the interest of the party, he speedily and completely dismissed his personal and family affairs from his meditations.

Francis meantime was hurrying homewards to pack the one portmantel permitted him by his patron. Mrs. Ann, coming in to find his room strewn with the contents of his cupboards, began to scold as she had got into the habit of doing in the days when her comb used unmercifully to tear through his thick hair and her soapy water to squirt into his eye.

"Lord! Master Francis what a litter you be in, sure*ly*! Marry come up! You make as much work in the house in a day as Master Ginckel 'ud make in a week—if it wasn't for his own man!"

When, however, she heard that he was to leave home that day and for a foreign country, she left off scolding and took the arrangement of his affairs into her own hands, packing for him not only the best of his own scanty possessions, but various articles belonging to other members of the family. When in the course of time these appropriations were discovered by the owners, there would no doubt be a good deal of grumbling; but every one was too much accustomed to her system of practical family socialism to seriously resent it.

Francis, after wandering round her vaguely for some time and being strictly forbidden to touch every article he offered to hand her, went down to the parlour to write a letter to Mrs. Vanhomrigh. He was glad Windsor was too far off to admit of his getting there and back before the afternoon, as otherwise he might have yielded to the temptation to see Esther once again before leaving England. At present he was too dazed to be very conscious either of pleasure or pain, but he knew that when he recovered himself, his intense satisfaction in his new career would only be tempered by his regret at parting from her. Yet even as regarded Esther, his present course was the only promising one. So far he knew only too well, she had never regarded him in any other light than as a younger brother, but his absence, his return in the character of a soldier and as he fondly hoped, a distinguished one, might change all that. If Swift should come forward as a suitor for her hand, then Francis could not doubt that she would under any circumstances be lost to him for ever. Something made him hope, and almost believe, that this would not happen.

His farewell letter took him long to write, but it was very brief. He was leaving the kindly roof which had sheltered his forsaken childhood—leaving it for the first time, not temporarily but permanently.

He was far from lacking in gratitude and in the piety of the hearth, but he had more than his share of that self-consciousness which is the dismal inheritance of his countrymen, and which makes it so much easier for them to express their unamiable than their kindly feelings; especially if the objects of those feelings happen to be persons with whom they are familiar. Consequently his letter contained little but a cold statement that owing to circumstances which he was not at liberty to mention, he was leaving England without having time to wish Mrs. Vanhomrigh and the young ladies good-bye. It concluded with a few small jests, an inquiry after the health of the party, and his love and duty to Mrs. Vanhomrigh. Having sealed the missive and entrusted it to Mrs. Ann, he went to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

"It rains with a *crescendo*," Swift observed, abstractedly putting down his pen.

"'Tis certainly unfortunate for you, sir," returned Essie, looking up from the manuscript in her hand.

"How so, miss?" asked he. "Come, this is one of your impudent sayings. A pretending brat that must needs be rallying like her betters! Explain yourself, Hessinage."

"No, no!" she said, and mimicking her mentor's voice and manner—"explanations are of all ballast the heaviest; a mere weighing down of conversation to the capacity of the dull."

"Bratikin!" cried he. "You think to whip me with my own tail, as you serve the puppy; but we mark you not."

He rose from his papers and walked to the window.

"Lord knows," he said, "I wish this rain were away, for if we could see anything, this fine prospect would turn you romantic, and then I should laugh. Yes, you are diverting, miss, when you turn romantic."

The windows of the small panelled parlour of the Prebendary's lodging where they sat, were among those that look out over the treetops and the Hundred Steps to the Thames and Eton, but now there was nothing to be seen from them but a grey misty veil of fine rain.

"And this to one that hath said neither O nor Ah to a sunset and a full moon! Well, Doctor, you may think meanly of me, yet I thank God I am not a stag-hunting Maid of Honour, with a hat-mark on her brow and a laugh like a horse-boy; I've seen one named Hyde or some such thing, that I'm sure you'd never love."

"Indeed, miss, you are mistook, for I love the creature dearly," he cried, and Essie laughed teasingly.

Now Mrs. Hyde was one of those ladies of quality with whom Swift had consented to be on terms of friendship, if they would observe his conditions; which were that the first advances should proceed from them and be made in due form. She had a fine face and figure and abundance of good spirits, which her hearty admiration of the great Doctor helped him at the time to mistake for wit. But though a satirist may have as much vanity as another, he is not so long or so easily duped by it, and Swift had soon perceived his devoted Mrs. Hyde to be not very different from the other Maids of Honour, for whom he had notoriously no liking; a discovery the loyalty of his nature forbade him to admit, but which Esther shrewdly guessed, and it must be confessed, was not sorry for. It was inevitable that she should be jealous. His power and distinction, which caused him to be flattered and sought after, made her part in his life so obviously small as compared with his part in her own. Then the acceptance of conditions, the calmness of middle-age, could not but appear coldness, when brought into contact with the revolts, the warm eagerness, the boundless claims and impossible projects which are the fairy gold of youthful friendship. These things alone, not to reckon a blinder and more fatal element fast intruding upon the domain of

friendship, sufficed to make it not disagreeable to her when the attentions lavished upon Swift by persons of importance failed to please him.

"The truth is, Hessinage," he said, "Mrs. Hyde hath made her *boutade.* But no matter—be neither moral nor witty over the *boutades* of others, Hess, for I warrant your own, that you are saving up for all this time, will be a bad one when it comes."

"When I know what you mean, Doctor, with your *boutade,* I shall know better how to answer you."

"When a horse, that has gone so quiet for a month that you have finally concluded him a sober animal, jerks out his hinder feet on a sudden, why, you know better than I, Mademoiselle, that the French call it a *boutade.* Heaven bless us! 'Tis what you all do sooner or later; ay, sooner or later, whether 'tis at the end of a week, a month, a year or ten years, every jade of you makes her *boutade* and lands us in the mud."

"Your sex, sir, are truly not guilty of *boutades,* for you kick so regular we cannot plead surprise, and must e'en make a shift to stick on, or take our mud with philosophy."

"Why, what fine young fellow hath been playing you a scurvy trick, Hess?" asked he. "It cannot be Ford, for only t'other day after dinner he drank to you under the name of 'the Jilt.'"

Hester laughed an unembarrassed laugh.

"Lord! that was a scurvy trick indeed of Mr. Ford's! Why, the truth is, he hath not bestowed a thought on my *beaux yeux* since this time last year, when he first made the acquaintance of Moll's. Sure, dear sir, I shall never get a husband unless Moll and I part company, for so soon as I have gotten myelf one poor ewe-lamb of an admirer, in comes this naughty miss and whisks him away to swell her train of adorers." But her countenance betrayed not a shadow of annoyance at the abduction or seduction of her followers.

"Odsbodikins, this is fine play-acting! You'd have me think you're not jealous of Moll, when if I write her the least smallest love-letter, or so much as

call her Brat or Slutikin, you're ready to tear my eyes out, Governor Huff, you know you are."

Hester looked down and picked at the tassel of a sofa-cushion.

"Sure," she said, "'tis all my fun—but then that's different. The dear creature's welcome to my admirers, but not to—not to——"

"Your friend. Well, you may be easy."

There was a short silence, broken by the entrance of a servant.

"Your Riverence, there's a fine young nobleman in a yaller chariot and splendid liveries and an umbrella and a nigger, wants to know if he may wait on the ladies."

Then he stepped across to the Doctor, and thrusting his head into his master's wig, whispered something.

"Shish—shish—shish!" cried Swift impatiently, shaking himself away. "What d'ye think I can make of that, you dog? Stand up and speak out, Patrick, and never consider the lady. She's above minding the compliments of a nobleman, or of his nigger either."

Patrick stood up and looked at Essie with a smile half-apologetic, half-ingratiating.

"Sure, my Lady, his Lordship wouldn't be for disturbing Madam Vanhomrigh for the world, nor wouldn't take the liberty of asking for Miss Vanhomrigh; 'tis no one at all, at all, but Miss Molly he'll be after troubling to-day."

"You may tell his Lordship," replied Swift, "that the ladies are abroad and will not return before dinner-time."

So Patrick retired to communicate his answer.

Swift's and Esther's eyes met, and she smiled faintly.

"Fortune and you befriend me to-day," she said. And then, after a pause. "What can I do, dear sir? What can I do to rid my sister of this young rake—for I suspect him to be little better than that."

Swift shrugged his shoulders: "Rid her of her infatuation for him."

"And how in Heaven's name am I to do so?"

"By means of her reason, Hessinage," returned Swift. "If you will forgive me for saying so, I think well of Molkin. She is yet very young, and she hath a greater love for the world and a milder and pleasanter disposition than Governor Huff, which causes her to be easily led into follies by them that should keep her out of them. But Moll hath an excellent shrewd wit, and, did you reason with her enough, might be brought to see 'tis mighty ridiculous to buy a pig in a poke. She knows stark nothing of this boy, except that he has a handsome face and a fine coat, and the very rank that dazzles her makes him scarce likely to mate with folks of our breeding. Pooh! reason with her, I say."

"Reason!" cried Essie in amazement. "Whoever yet found reason strong enough to drive out love?"

"I have found it so," replied Swift sternly. "Others would, if they did but believe it possible, but they resign themselves to suffer from this complaint because they fancy there's no remedy for it. Do you think that I am more insensible than another man to the charms of beauty, of wit, of sense and virtue? No; there was a time, the time when I first found all these united in the person of one young woman, when I felt as great an inclination as any to play the lover and the fool; but my reason told me that, with my narrow means, such as would indeed be bare beggary for a wife and family, and with my uneasy temper and very ill health, marriage was not for me, and I resolved to rest content with being her friend. 'Tis a resolution I applaud as often as I see a pair of lovers that have been a twelvemonth married, for it allows me to suppose she and I had been more faithful in our fondness, had we permitted ourselves to love. But come, bratikins, I talk of myself, when I meant but to persuade you that the strength of this passion is grossly exaggerated, 'Tis like some monster of your favourite romances that fades to air in the grasp of the bold champion that grapples with it."

Esther had listened with a changing colour and

questioning eyes. Who, ah, who was the woman he could have loved under a more fortunate star? Deep in her heart a siren voice whispered *Esther Vanhomrigh.*

Returning with an effort to her former pre-occupation, as he ended—

"It may be as you say," she returned, "but where is the power to make her grapple with it?" Then, "Alas! how can I talk over my sister's unhappy infatuation even with you, sir? I do very wrong. But 'tis my excuse that, as you know well, our poor fond mamma hath a younger head on her shoulders than any of us, and thinks no harm of the matter, and when I am troubled about it, to whom should I turn but to the best, the wisest friend that ever woman found? Yet I doubt I do wrong. You must forgive me, though Moll would not."

She spoke quietly, but her companion, familiar with her every gesture and expression, divined there was trouble beneath the exterior calm of her demeanour, and his perception of that touched the deep vein of tenderness, of womanly sympathy in him, that made him dear to women. The more dear, perhaps, because the tenderness lay below, or was mingled with, much apparent and some real cynicism, and a bitterness and scorn of men which were like his power of sympathy, the outcome of a hyper-sensitive nature. Now when he saw that Esther was in trouble, he sat down by her and took her hand gently, as an elder brother might have done.

"Never blame yourself for that, Hesskin," he said. "What's told to me is dropped down the castle well. You have on your young shoulders the cares without the authority of women twice your age, and 'tis no wonder you turn somewhere for counsel, little Hesskinage. As for Molly, the slut, you know I love her very well, and am not the fool of the vulgar opinion which condemns the betrayal of an innocent sentiment more than it winks at the harbouring of a guilty one. No; virtuous breasts, as I have told you a thousand times, need never fear to show what's in 'em. I am as vexed as you that Molkin has cast a

favourable eye on this puppy, but if she were more secret in the matter, I should be more apt to suspect evil than now, when, as she does not conceal her preference, I'm convinced there's nothing ill in it but the object."

"You speak comfortable words," said Esther; "yet Shakespeare says somewhere 'tis no wise thing for the best of hearts to be worn on the sleeve—the daws will peck at it."

"Fudge, child!" replied Swift, patting her hand rather hard before he dropped it. "You think too much of your old plays, and they're better, truly, than modern romances, yet by no means the best books for a young gentlewoman's reading. When the day comes that you have such a heart under your kerchief as you are ashamed to take out and pin to your elbow-ruffles for my inspection—why, on that day you may take Master Shakespeare for your friend instead of the Doctor. Now, since you are so pretending as to quote poetry, I shall read you out this manuscript of Mr. Pope's, which is to my mind the smoothest verse yet writ in our language."

Esther gave him up the manuscript, which was that of a poem entitled "Windsor Forest," and in a fine, well-modulated voice Swift began to read :—

> "Thy forest, Windsor! and thy green retreats,
> At once the monarch's and the muse's seats,
> Invite my lays."

So he continued for sixty-eight lines, which, treating of Lady Granville, Eden, Olympus, Pan, Flora, Queen Anne, and William the Conqueror, followed each other with all the regularity and pompous inanity of a string of geese. At the sixty-eighth line he paused and repeated—

> "The hollow winds through naked temples roar."

"What think you of that line?" he asked. "To my mind the sound answers marvellously to the sense."

Esther gave a guilty start, and murmured some reply which committed her to nothing.

"Your wits are gone wool-gathering," he said sharply. "You are wont to be a better listener. Come, now, a penny for your thoughts."

She blushed deeply.

"Mr. Pope's are so much finer," she answered. "Pray, Doctor, continue and read me that line again. 'Twas but in a moment of inattention it slipped me."

"A goodly moment!" grumbled Swift. "I'll wager you have heard nought since Mr. Pope made his fine bow to Granville in the opening. No, you shall read it yourself, Miss Essie, though you can no more read than a magpie."

This last accusation was unfair. Essie was his own pupil, and one with natural gifts. As she read the empty monotonous lines took meaning and sweetness from her intonation and voice, and though from time to time her master snatched the manuscript from her hand to correct her rendering of some pet passage of his, he could not quite conceal his satisfaction in her performance. Just as she had begun the invocation to the Thames, a sound of feet and voices was heard on the staircase, and in another minute Mrs. Vanhomrigh entered, followed by Molly, Mr. Lewis, and a young man whom Swift greeted warmly by the name of Ford.

"I thought you was to have stayed in town for your business all this week, Ford," he said.

Mr. Ford made some wordily inadequate excuse for his unexpected reappearance, which in fact was due to the Vanhomrighs' visit, and turned the conversation by producing a packet of letters for the Doctor which he had picked up for him at the St. James' Coffee House. Swift glanced at the superscription, and laid the packet on the table.

"Lord, Doctor!" cried Madam Van, looking at it, "I always said you was a magician, and here's the proof of it! You keep a double in Ireland to write you all that's doing there with your very own hand. Why, I never thought there was so much news in Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught all put together as would swell a package to that size."

Swift coloured visibly.

"The writer," he replied, after an almost imperceptible pause, "was a pupil of mine some twenty years ago, and keeps the trick of my capitals. But never mind the letter; here's Ford can give us the latest news of London, a place which, for my part, I value more than fourteen Irelands put together."

"Luckily," he added to himself, "Ppt.'s hand is not obtrusively feminine." His discomfort at the sight of the letter was not altogether due to the possible observations of others upon it. Something in his own breast, which he called "undue scrupulosity," had made certain observations to him several times in the course of the last year, and several times he had completely replied to them.

"It is true," he said, "I no longer feel the same necessity to write all my doings to Ppt. I have nothing to tell her but politics, politics, politics, for which pretty Ppt. cares not a button, and disappointments whenever a Bishopric falls in. It is true I am not so glad as I was to catch sight of a letter from her, stuck up in the little glass window of the St. James'. I love her as well as ever, but poor Ppt.'s life is dull. I don't believe she has got two new acquaintances in Dublin since I left, and if she had, confound 'em, I shouldn't care to hear of 'em. The diverting witch can get you a jest out of a bluebottle fly when you are in her company, but her pen is none so witty as her tongue, and I am tired of hearing that the Dean and Stoyte and Walls are at piquet as usual with her, and I know Goody Walls has a baby once a year, and don't care to hear who stands godfather, and who eat the christening cake."

To other observations of his spiritual foe he would reply—

"Yes, silly Ppt. would be jealous if she knew. Women are foolish, unreasonable creatures, and were she my wife, I should be forced to tell her what does not concern her and submit to her caprices or live in misery. But I am not even her lover, still less Hessinage's. A man may not have more than one wife, but he may surely have as many as two friends. And 'tis my weakness that I cannot be con-

tent without a woman about me. I know not how it is but there's something too much of my mother in my composition. I am glad the world does not suspect it. Be sure when I have charming Ppt. again, I shall want no other."

And who was this charming Ppt., whose letter lay there unopened on the table, while Esther Vanhomrigh at Swift's command read out Mr. Pope's poem to the assembled company? What pet name lurked in the shelter of that hieroglyph is only divined, not known, by those who now share with her the contents of those private packages that for so long had reached her eager hands once a fortnight, and of late had been exchanged for rarer and less detailed letters. But on the outside of them is written legibly the name of Mrs. Esther Johnson. By this time she was expecting another, and it was not even on its way to her. The 10th of September was a rainy day in Dublin as well as at Windsor. When the evening began to fall it left off raining, but the faint yellow reflection of an invisible sunset in the puddles and gutters of the muddy street did nothing to enhance its cheerfulness. Mrs. Johnson was by no means of a moody or querulous disposition, but it was unquestionably dull in the little panelled parlour, with no companion but Dingley, who was dozing over her darning. It was chilly too. Dingley was always exceedingly put out if a fire was lighted before the exact middle of September. As she could quote Dr. Swift as being of her mind on the subject, because certain little rules of this nature are desirable to restrain us from luxury, Mrs. Johnson commonly gave in to her prejudice. She sat idly in the window-seat, not for want of the will to employ herself, but because her eyes had to be spared. The large lustrous brown eyes were from time to time troublesome to their owner, and the inactivity their weakness imposed on one of her active temperament did more to impair her temper and spirits than a serious misfortune could have done. In the street life was not eventful. A posse of bare-legged ragged children pattered by

through the dirt, and a strong-lunged pedlar-woman made the street ring with "Gentlemen's gloves! Good Worcester gloves! Four shillings the pair!" The pedlar paused under the window, and held up a pair of gloves temptingly, with wreathed smiles. Mrs. Johnson shook her pretty head—what use had she for gentlemen's gloves?—and retreated into the room.

"Dingley!" she cried sharply, "Dingley, you are asleep."

Dingley sat up very straight, and stuck her needle into her finger. "Asleep?" she repeated, "I swear I was nothing of the kind."

"Oh, you're like the parrot that learned to swear when it was young, and couldn't forget it," returned Esther Johnson, alluding to the frequency with which she had heard this asseveration.

But Dingley continued talking, unconscious of the sarcasm:

"Lord knows I often wish I *could* take forty winks as some folks can, being such a bad sleeper. All our family are such bad sleepers, but the others do get their forty winks, while I can't close my eyes, when once I'm up. Yet I want it more than any, for I'm sure last night I heard every clock strike."

"I wonder you could hear 'em," replied Mrs. Esther. "I couldn't—you was snoring too loud."

Now it is well known that to be accused of snoring rouses ire in the meekest bosom, and Mrs. Dingley's was not especially meek.

"Lord ha' mercy!" she cried, "was ever such a thing heard? Snoring? Me? Highty-tighty! miss, I'd have you to know the Reverend Dingley, that was my husband half a dozen years, never once heard me snore."

"No," returned Esther, with a mischievous laugh, "they never do, the husbands. They're afraid to, poor creatures; they'll be damned for perjury before they'll venture it."

Mrs. Dingley bridled in silent indignation before she replied,

"Mrs. Johnson, I'd have you to know your language is most unbecoming. Fie, miss! An

unmarried woman to talk so familiarly about husbands! You'd have some right to speak, if you'd taken one when you'd got the chance."

"Such a chance, Dingley! Sure you yourself thought at the time I might do better, and I think so still."

Mrs. Dingley shook her head dubiously. The little tiff between her and her companion had blown over as quickly as it had come on, for both were irritable rather than bad-tempered.

"'Tis true, Miss Hetty," she said, "I made sure you'd get a match to your liking before many months were over. But there! Things have turned out very unlucky, and the chance is gone now. Yet I couldn't but think of it when I met Tisdall at the Stoytes t'other day, looking quite like a gentleman in a new gown and bands, and Mrs. Tisdall as happy as a queen, with a fine boy just fifteen months old and another expected."

"For shame, Dingley!" returned Hetty. "You shouldn't wish I'd robbed the poor lady of her happiness. 'Twould have been like the old tale of the dog in the manger. Fancy being happy to have one child like Tisdall and to be threatened with another!"

"True, the boy did take after his father," said Dingley, "yet I tell you, my dear, 'twas a fine boy all the same."

"Of course," replied Esther, "I knew it. Tisdall must have been a fine boy at fifteen months, with his bouncing cheeks and goggle blue eyes. I shoud have hated Tisdall at fifteen months. His feet! O do you remember his feet, Dingley, and how Pdfr. used to laugh at 'em?"

"Sure, Swift was always pleased enough to laugh at Tisdall, that I know."

"But, Dingley, dear Dingley, don't you remember when he came courting that Good Friday, dressed up so smart except for his feet, and they was in great old brown bulging shoes, for all the world like a couple of hot cross buns? Lord, how Pdfr. laughed when I told him!"

"How silly you talk, Hetty! 'Twas well enough when you was a girl to think your lover must be a beauty, but a woman of your age ought to have greater sense than to suppose a man's looks are here or there when he's your husband. Sure the Reverend Dingley was as the Lord made him, and I never gave his looks a thought from the time we left the church door. I own when we was walking down the church together, and I saw my Aunt Dawson whispering to my cousin Tibbs, I felt afraid lest they should be passing remarks on his shape; but then 'twas but natural *they* should be spiteful on account of the family quarrel about the jewels, my grandmother's jewels that was lost in the——"

"Oh, yes, I know all that," put in Hetty hastily, for she had heard the impending anecdote but too often already. "But don't tease, DD. 'Tis silly to fancy every single woman pining for a husband. Silly—silly, I say."

Mrs. Dingley could have replied something as to the different view of matrimony Mrs. Johnson would have taken, if the Reverend Doctor, who had come forward so honourably three years ago, had been another than Dr. Tisdall. But in spite of his absence, fear of Swift more or less restrained her loquacity in speaking of him to Esther. She contented herself with saying, "Lord, my dear, where's the harm if they do? 'Tis but nature," and would have proceeded to relate in her low, quick, monotonous voice a series of totally uninteresting anecdotes, concerning the marriages of professed spinsters of her acquaintance, if Mrs. Johnson had not cut her short with: "'Tis in the nature of our sex to be foolish, that I know well, but one that hath had the advantage to be educated by Dr. Swift should be above some female weaknesses. I trust, though a female, I have sense enough to see that a parcel of brats would scarce afford pleasure to a woman who detests 'em; nor would they be made more endurable by the addition of a self-important ass of a husband. As to love, 'tis the silliest, tiresomest passion in the world, and the aptest to end in peevishness and wrangling. A woman who has had the

happiness to possess the best of friends these twenty years, knows better than to desire so worthless a thing as a lover."

"Marry come up, Hetty!" cried Mrs. Dingley, who, though she had heard these sentiments periodically for years, had never recovered her surprise and indignation at them. "You're a strange girl—and Swift too, what a strange man! There's quite a couple of you."

She would have liked, but feared, to add that Esther at any rate would have found some advantages in their being made a couple in a matrimonial sense, as a husband could not easily have betaken himself across St. George's Channel for an indefinite period, and left his wife behind him in Dublin. Years ago she had daily expected Swift to make an offer of marriage to Mrs. Johnson, and had repined at the probability of its depriving her of their joint home. Now she felt personally injured and deceived at the offer never having been made. That his insufficient means, real or supposed, alone prevented it, she never doubted, and she and Mrs. Walls and Mrs. Stoyte had long agreed that such caution did not become a clergyman; it argued a want of trust in Providence. If, when the long and vainly expected preferment at last came, Swift was in the same mind as when he left Dublin, they all felt sure that he would return and marry Mrs. Johnson. The question was, would he after so long an absence—no one could as yet put a definite term to it—after having entered as an admired and honoured guest the most distinguished circles in London, after having won fame by his pen and favour by his social qualities, would he be content to return to Esther Johnson? Beautiful she was and witty, but after all only the daughter of Sir William Temple's steward. Swift's old Dublin acquaintances knew well that though he never spoke of it, he never forgot his birth was gentle, and that in spite of his practical benevolence to his sister Mrs. Fenton, he resented her husband's plebeian person and calling as much as his bad character. He who trampled on nobles and treated his social inferiors with punctili-

ous courtesy, would not for a coronet have been supposed the born equal of those inferiors. His enemies in the Temple family knew well how to mortify him when they set it about that he had occupied a menial position in the household at Moor Park. It was a sufficient humiliation to his haughty nature to remember that he had occupied a dependent one, and had trembled at a master's frown. He remained grateful to the memory of that severe master; but he liked to reflect that he was now a more influential political personage than Sir William had been in his most self-important days. By marrying Mrs. Esther Johnson he would confirm the calumnies of the Temples, for her mother was still a sort of housekeeper to Sir William's sister, Lady Gifford. Esther herself had while a young child, been given a special position at Moor Park. Sir William's honoured lady had spent many pleasant hours at play with the little maid, whose baby beauty and activity had triumphed over the disadvantages of a tight linen cap and a long dress. After her ladyship's death the recollection of this would alone have recommended the child to Sir William, had not her native grace and charm been enough to do so. When Swift arrived at Moor Park, a young man of twenty, Esther was six years old and the pet of the household. When Sir William had sent for the new secretary after dinner, he was too nervous to notice at the time, but afterwards remembered, a little black-eyed girl who stood at the great man's elbow cracking nuts for him by dint of vast exertions, and occasionally receiving a sip of Malaga as a reward. When the recollection of Dorothy, Lady Temple, had somewhat faded from the memory of the household, the servants of Moor Park invented a legend which accounted for the partiality of their master for little Miss Hetty, by supposing her to be more nearly related to him than he cared to acknowledge; his will, which secured to her a small independence, gave some colour to the invention. Such was the origin of Esther Johnson, and the explanation of much that was anomalous in her position. She had a mother and a sister living, but her social

education had made it difficult for her to share her life with them, even had her means permitted her to support them. She continued on affectionate terms with them, but after Sir William's death she joined her small income to that of Mrs. Dingley, and set up house with her. It had needed little persuasion on Swift's part to induce them to leave Farnham for Dublin, on the plea that money bore a higher interest in Ireland than in England, and they had now passed twelve years in that country, sometimes at Trim, sometimes in Dublin. When Swift had left Ireland some two years before, as an envoy from the Irish clergy to the Queen's Government, it was thought that his absence would be short; but when his cause was won, and those for whom he had won it treated him neither with gratitude nor honour, while in London the leaders of the Tory party were bidding eagerly for his support, he was easily persuaded to remain there. With St. John and Harley and Mrs. Masham, all honestly anxious to serve him, it seemed inevitable that he should rise high in the Church, and that before long. The one obstacle to his promotion was the Queen's prejudice against him. The Archbishop of York had impressed upon her Majesty that Dr. Swift's "Tale of a Tub" proved him little better than an infidel, which indeed his Grace had always suspected him of being. Her favourite, the Duchess of Somerset, had implored her with tears not to promote so remorseless a foe of the fair petitioner's. Queen Anne, who was determined since her escape from the tyranny of the Marlboroughs to show her Ministers from time to time she had a will of her own, selected the point of Dr. Swift's promotion as a fitting one on which to oppose them. It was sufficiently simple and unimportant to admit of her doing so, without any undue strain on her feeble intellectual and moral faculties. Meantime Swift, ignorant of this real opponent, lingered on in London, pamphleteering for, dining with, domineering over the most powerful men in the kingdom, and able to obtain favours for everybody except himself. Sometimes in his letters he talked of retiring in disgust to his

canals and his fruit-trees at his vicarage of Laracor. He talked of it, but he never came.

"'Tis a long time, ain't it, since we got a packet from London?" said Dingley, after an interval of silence. Mrs. Johnson was staring at the grate, so black and cheerless it looked as though it never could have been or be again a thing of warmth and cheerfulness.

"No longer than I should expect," she answered sharply. "He told us not to look for journals while State matters were so heavy upon him."

And she shivered a little as she spoke, for the night was certainly cold.

CHAPTER VII.

In after years when Swift proposed, though he probably never seriously intended, to make additions to his story of "Cadenus and Vanessa," he mentioned "The Windsor Expedition," or "The Indisposition at Windsor," as an incident not to be omitted. The weeks which Swift and Esther Vanhomrigh had spent at Kensington in the summer of 1711 had also marked a stage in the advance of their intimacy. Esther had gone thither on a visit to an invalid friend, and Swift, in search of country air and lodgings, had been nothing loth to take some rooms within easy reach of her temporary home. He had a fancy for educating ladies, which was singular perhaps, but praiseworthy, at a time when most of those he met in the finest society read or wrote worse than a modern maid-of-all-work; evening after evening that summer had he brought his book into the parlour, where Esther's friend lay on her couch and she herself was sitting by her, book in hand, or preparing against his probable coming the fragrant coffee which his soul loved. The long softly-draped figure and pale intelligent face of the invalid, the window beyond her opening on the purple night and the silent masses of the Kensington trees, the big moths floating in at it and booming and

banging against the candles—there was not a detail of the scene which did not vividly return to Esther's mind ten years after, when Swift bade her remember "The Sick Lady at Kensington." These evenings and the semi-accidental meetings of a morning in the Gardens, alone or behind the sick lady's chair, gave Swift and Esther a feeling of special intimacy with each other, beyond his general intimacy with the family as an old friend of Mrs. Vanhomrigh's hospitable house. He had always indeed entertained a secret partiality for Esther, at first because she bore a name he liked to utter, and afterwards for her own sake. He called her a "presuming chit," when she threw herself ardently into the discussion of the politics which were then his own absorbing interest, and an "ignorant, romantic brat," when she praised her own favourite romance or criticised someone else's; but for all that he listened.

Up to the Kensington episode, however, he had not regularly read with her or directed her studies. He had loved almost as well—more, Esther thought—to pun and laugh with Molly, to rally her on her "fellows" and bring her French sweetmeats, begged from Lady Bolingbroke's store. It was the one point on which Esther had ever felt inclined to resent her sister's superior attractions. Since at the age of sixteen she had first made his acquaintance, Swift had been the particular object of her homage. Perhaps Francis was right in accusing her of mingling some vanity with her preference for distinguished wit. Nemesis does not often smite totally unprovoked; it is in the disproportionate weight of her punishments, not in the innocence of the victims, that her injustice is shown. On wet days or when he had nothing else to do, as he was careful to tell Mrs. Johnson, Swift had long been in the habit of dropping in to dinner with Madame Van, and spending hours either in the front parlour with the smart and the witty people who somehow affected the ladies' society, or in the "sluttery," as he nicknamed the back-parlour, over coffee and oranges with them alone. As often as not he mentioned his visits to the house in his Journals to

Mrs. Johnson, but no one reading those brief allusions of his would guess that the parlour where he represented himself as yawning away his time he knew not why, was called by him in a letter to another, "the happiest place in the world."

On his return from Windsor with the completed *History of the Peace of Utrecht* in his portmanteau, the readings were resumed. Molly assisted at them less frequently than before. The two sisters' paths in life showed ominous signs of separating. Up till now their tastes and pursuits had not been fundamentally different; each had liked reading, dancing and company in her different degree, though in the matter of company Esther had always been fastidious. But Molly's enjoying temperament and universal popularity were leading her more and more into a world that was merely gay and fine, while Esther grew more and more impatient of any society, except that in which she could at least talk of matters in which her master was interested. She asked no better amusement than to sit on a stool by the fire with her elbows on her knees, reading Rollin's *History of the Ancients*, or Mr. Dryden's translation of *Virgil's Æneid*. Swift's lessons she was able to return in kind, for having been educated at a school kept by a French lady in the neighbourhood of London, and having also spent some months in Paris, her French was very superior to that of most other young ladies who aspired to a knowledge of that language. It annoyed the Doctor to be unable to join in or even follow the conversation at Bolingbroke's, when some of his host's many foreign acquaintances were among the guests. In his anxiety to improve his knowledge of the language, he even read with Esther a considerable portion of *Le Grand Cyrus*, though no one had less patience than he with the still fashionable French romance.

It was half after eight o'clock one evening in the February following the Windsor expedition, when Esther Vanhomrigh was just lifting the coffee-pot off the fire in the back-parlour, that a chairman's loud rat-tat-tat sounded at the street-door. She stood lis-

tening with the coffee-pot in her hand. Presently from the wide passage that served as a hall there rose the sound of voices, the chairman disputing his fare with a customer who was by no means inclined to give in to his demands. A flush, a faint smile, not of amusement but of expectation, passed over her lifted face. Then a well-known heavy step came slowly up the stairs and Swift entered unannounced, for the man-servant was absent with Mrs. Vanhomrigh and Molly. He wore his sombre look, and after the least possible greeting sat down by the fire and stared at it in silence. Essie poured out a cup of coffee and placed it by his side. Then she stood with one foot on the fender and one hand raised to the high mantel-shelf, also staring at the fire. She had abandoned the plain cap she had once adopted as likely to please his taste for neatness, because he had on the contrary censured it as affected. Her thick blonde hair fell in curls on her neck, in the graceful fashion of the time, and her round neck and arms gleamed from the loose black wrapper branched with silver, which she had appropriated from her mother's always too abundant supply of half-worn garments. People who had met her this winter in the Park or at assemblies had pronounced the eldest Miss Vanhomrigh to be grown uncommonly handsome.

"Drink your coffee, come now, drink your coffee," she said at last imperiously. "That's the way you let it spoil, and then you call it ratsbane—good coffee at six and sixpence a pound."

Swift took the cup.

"It may be ratsbane in earnest for all I care," he said. "I'm half poisoned already."

"Where do you come from?" she asked. "How late you are, when you told me you would be early! I had almost given up hopes of you."

"From Lord Treasurer's," he replied shortly, drinking his coffee.

"Had he no news?" she questioned. "Are the Bishoprics filled up? Who will be Dean of Wells?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask the town-crier. He will know before I. My grann'am used to say:—

"'More of your lining
And less of your dining.'"

"Oh, 'tis shameful! Shameful!" she cried. "'Tis well I don't know either Lord Treasurer or the Secretary, for if I did I should never contain myself. Truly such ingratitude, such base, base ingratitude, is enough to make splenetics of us all."

The cloud on Swift's brow lightened; he looked up half arch, half tender. It was not in nature to feel otherwise than gratified when the bitterness and indignation repressed in his own proud bosom found vehement expression in that vivid young face and the music of that young impassioned voice.

"O Governor Huff, Governor Huff!" he exclaimed, "the poor fellows think they have enough to do with her old Grace—Disgrace I mean—of Marlborough and red-haired Somerset against them; how they would tremble did they see the valiant Amazonian Hesskin ready to charge upon their rear! Pooh, I say! Let me have none of your petticoats in politics."

Esther threw herself into a chair and tossed her chin.

"Yet you have told me fifty times that had L. T. or my Lord Secretary half the sense of Mrs. Masham the country might be saved."

"Masham is a good creature, a sensible creature, I don't deny it. I love her dearly, and think she does me the offices of a friend."

"A friend!" cried Esther, "a mighty fine friend! She that hath her Majesty's ear, and hath only to whisper in it to put you in the place you merit! Yet here you abide but plain Jonathan Swift, Vicar of Laracor."

"You wrong her, Hessinage; I'm convinced she hath done all she durst venture on my behalf." He sighed and went on with a curious plaintiveness and hesitation, "I know not what to think except that the Queen does not love me. But why does not her Majesty love me, Hess?—answer me that, you witch, for 'tis more than my reason can tell me."

Even with her master Esther was apt to exhibit more candour than tact.

"One need be no witch to guess that your writings have given her offence," she answered.

Among the strange weaknesses and tendernesses of Swift's complex nature was to be reckoned a sentiment of personal loyalty of an emotional, almost religious nature; a kind of loyalty the former existence of which we now admit as a historical fact without being able to understand it. In him this sentiment was already but a survival; it could not subdue his reason enough to make a Jacobite of him, but it could make him very sensitive to the disfavour of the last Stuart Queen. When Esther had spoken, his head dropped on his breast, his dark cheek grew paler and he answered nothing. She took an orange from the dish ready for him, prepared it and placed it at his side. It was the customary attention which he was used to call his tribute, and to accept with mock regality, but this evening he thanked her almost humbly and cried with a dreary smile, "Coffee and oranges! Ay, those are the only good things in London; the only good things I sha'n't get at Laracor." And then he was silent again. Esther was accustomed to his silences, and liked them almost better than talk. There was a feeling of intimacy in being admitted to them. After a while she rose, took some books from the shelf and put them quietly on the table. Swift shook his head smilingly at them.

"Kind, kind Slutikin!" he said. "Thou know'st there's nothing soothes the enraged politician like philosophy and the *belles lettres*; 'tis the one sentiment in which even the Lord Treasurer and the Secretary can agree. But, Esther," he continued, pushing the books away, "I have seen this long while that your studies weary you, and for all your good nature what wearies you cannot please me."

"Weary me?" she cried. "Oh, how? When?"

"How? When?" he repeated with a somewhat bitter playfulness. "It is easy to see how studies may weary a fine young miss whose eyes are made for brighter things than books, and as to *when*—why,

when you cannot put your mind into what you are doing."

"Sure, sir, you're not blaming poor weak female brains for their dulness," said she, biting her fan.

"A fig for your excuses, you impudent madam. Dull you are not, but an idle, lazy, ignorant hussy, that wants to be shaking her heels to a fiddle with the young fellows, I warrant her, instead of poring over grave books with a gown of forty. Pshaw, Hess! 'Tis a vile excuse. I know as well as any what female brains are like, and I tell you yours are not such. Ha'n't I taught a young woman before now, ay, and one that's twenty times wittier than you? The little monkey was quick to learn and quick to forget, and understood her book but never thought over it, and could give me back my own opinions so much better than I had expressed 'em myself, that on my conscience I took 'em for hers. Consider, miss, how different from your behaviour, you that dispute every word I utter and must needs forsooth have your pretending opinions. She liked her book for—other people's sake; but you was meant to spend your days grubbing in college libraries and to end 'em a Bentley. O Lord! O Lord! Smoke little Hesskin a Bentley!"

He had talked out his irritability and smiled.

"Pray scold, sir, so long as you make it plain 'tis but for scolding's sake. Sure never was woman compounded of such opposite vices! A giddy hussy and a pedantic book-worm!"

"'Tis monstrous I own, but 'tis the truth. The scholar got the better of the hussy for a month or two, but now she will not be denied. I saw you last Wednesday, miss, at Lady Lansdowne's, standing up with some puppy or other; the company was saying you danced very finely, but as to that I am no judge; I only know you was looking as proud as a peacock and as pleased as Punch, and all because you was strutting about and being handed round by a red-heeled jackanapes, before the smartest drabs of quality in London. On your honour, did you not enjoy yourself mightily at Lady Lansdowne's?"

"I will not deny it, sir; I was pleased you should see 'tis a false accusation you bring against me when you say that I do not love fine company only because I cannot be of consequence in it."

"On your honour again, Essie, are not your thoughts wandering to all the diversions you miss when you have let Moll go off to her moderns in her finest clothes, and leave you in the sluttery with your ancients in—in a mob, or whatever you ladies call that *déshabillé* of yours?"

And he looked curiously, perhaps approvingly at her dress.

"Indeed, sir, you are mistook. You forget I have been longer in the world than Molly, and have worn so many smart clothes and seen so much smart company, I am tired of it all. O I love it well enough now and then, when I am not splenetic, but never so well as coffee in the sluttery."

Swift appeared to be satisfied, and opening *Tully of Moral Ends*, began to read aloud.

Presently he came to this passage:—"Epicurus declares it his opinion that wisdom among all the ingredients of happiness has not a nobler, a richer, or more delightful one than friendship."

"Ay," he said, "'tis in such sentiments as these we see the true wisdom of the ancients and their superiority to us barbarous moderns. We who say little of friendship, but are for ever celebrating *love, love, love* with the most ridiculous earnestness."

"Pray, sir," replied Esther with spirit—for the Doctor had lately shown peculiar animosity to the tender passion—"must there not be some good in a sentiment those great wits, the poets, agree in celebrating, and Christian times have honoured much more than heathen?"

"Simpleton! You know as well as I the Christian Church permits but does not encourage human folly, and as for great wits, 'tis admitted they are the greatest fools."

"How loth would a certain great wit be to admit it in his own person!" cried she, holding up her finger. "But seriously you cannot expect me to

admire a conclusion which would shut us poor women out of the best part of your hearts, as we are already shut out of the best part of your minds."

"H'm! The worst's too good for 'em. Let me tell you though, that when a woman deserves our friendship she gets it. Epicurus himself, who was by no means the rake he is vulgarly supposed, had several ladies among his intimates and followers."

"And you, sir, own yourself indebted to the friendship of the ladies Berkeley for much greater gains than prizes and promotions. Sure we are agreed in praising such friendship, and agreed too that 'tis rare. You say 'tis because we are unworthy of it, but your instance helps to show you wrong, for 'tis not the common kind of men who make friends of women, only the superior ones. Now do not laugh but listen, and I will tell you why. A booby, you know, always loves to entrench himself behind the superiority of his sex, and that for very good reasons. Great wits like you, sir, do not fear a familiarity which can but breed the more respect. Then in ordinary men there is a coldness, a dullness of disposition, that makes them unapt to consider or feel with others in any very intimate manner. 'Tis so much easier to despise foreigners and women than to understand 'em, that 'tis no wonder dull fellows prefer it. But some noble minds, the bent of whose genius it is to understand every language of the human heart, some such learn ours, and *they* love to converse with us—yes, they do, Doctor, though they have the weakness to be ashamed of it when they get among common men, and to abuse us heartily, lest they should be suspected of partiality for us."

"I will pass you your strictures on my sex, miss—the more because I know 'em to be solely prompted by jealousy—and your reflection on my honesty—though I smoked it at once—in consideration of the compliments to myself you have mixed with your stuff. Lord, Lord! Poor Isaac Bickerstaff is fallen low in the world, when he is obliged to an ignorant brat for her fine speeches. Besides, though you have long been off the point of the argument, you have

let me see in a sidelong kind of way—for 'tis the right to our *friendship* I observe you vindicate with so much warmth—that you are not quite the fool you made yourself out, when you talked about love. Pray now confirm my good opinion of your sense by confessing 'twas merely for the sake of disputing you contradicted me, when you know as well as I 'tis a very contemptible passion."

Esther blushed and hesitated.

"I cannot think," she said, "that love is always contemptible. It does not appear so in Petrarca, or in the heroes of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, who were all, they say, drawn from real personages."

"Believe me, child, this love is always the same thing in the highest as in the lowest. Real personages be hanged! 'Tis these rascally poets and romance writers that cheat women out of the little sense Nature gave 'em. Could the poor creatures see the world as it really is, even they would not snatch at the bait so readily, whether 'twere an offer of marriage or mere gallantry. To be complimented and caressed beyond reason for a few years, and treated with contempt for the rest of her life—that is commonly the lot of a woman, even if she be beautiful and well-endowed. I pity 'em, poor creatures! But that they should be so well-pleased with a passion that serves 'em thus scurvily, *that* is what I find surprising—no, not surprising, for what folly is surprising in woman or man either for that matter? Fools, fools all! But truly 'tis very laughable, and despicable too. Love, indeed! I thought, you silly Hess, *you* had more discretion than to talk of such pernicious nonsense to me."

Swift was tired, irritated, sick with hope deferred, and he poured forth his scorn of men, women, and love with the ferocious bitterness of voice and countenance peculiar to him. Esther was silent. He looked round and saw her leaned on her elbow and shading her eyes with her hand.

"Slutikin," he said gently, "are those tears I see?"

She did not answer, and he drew her hand away from her face and held it.

"What is it, my child?" he asked anxiously.

She was still silent, but the large tears rolled down her flushed cheeks and dropped into her bosom, making her look like the child he called her. With her free left hand she fumbled for her handkerchief to wipe them away. Swift whipped out his own large one and thrust it into her hand.

"There, there," he said, "take it, 'tis silk. Lady Bolingbroke gave it me."

At another time Esther would have answered with gibes, asking him whether he had yet got a countess to find him his perukes, for they all knew there was one that kept him in night-caps, and whether ladies of less quality were still allowed to mend his cassock.

This time she said nothing, but dried her tears with the red bandana.

"Little dear Essie," he cried, "I beg you to tell me what I have said to distress you."

Esther had for a young woman brought up in good society a remarkable incapacity for telling those small fibs without which it would be unmanageable. Even if she attempted to do so she totally failed to deceive. So now, instead of offering a plausible excuse with confidence, she pressed the handkerchief to her lips, looked away from the Doctor, and said in a muffled voice, "Oh, nothing, sir, nothing at all. 'Tis the spleen."

"Pish!" cried he, "tis true you are often confoundedly splenetic, but that's not the way you show it."

"Oh, sir, 'tis my fortune!—and Ginckel, and—and the debts," she returned incoherently, and snatching away her hand she buried her whole face in the bandana and began to cry again.

"What the deuce! When your Cousin Purvis has just been fool enough to pay every debt your mamma durst tell her of? And you that's gone into the whole matter like a lawyer, know well enough Ginckel can't touch your fortune. Don't lie, Brat, till you can lie better."

Esther unable to defend her excuses made no reply. Swift rose and paced up and down the room in an irritated manner.

"The truth is, Hess," he said at last, "you are in love. I have several times suspected as much."

"Oh, no, no," cried Esther, burying her face yet deeper in the pocket-handkerchief. "'Tis cruel of you to say so."

"The truth is never cruel, my dear," he returned with grave kindness, sitting down beside her. "I own I was wrong to speak in so violent and general a way of a passion common to the bad and the good. My excuse must be, that the bad are so greatly in the majority, that in speaking of mankind one aims at them. But, my dear, you must be sensible that I do not judge Molkin severely, who I'll be bound has found a worse object for her affections than you are like to. To be sure I spoke too strongly—'twas that Tokay of Lord Treasurer's which disorders the stomach and heats the head; I will drink no more of it. In virtuous young ladies, such as Molkin or yourself, what is called love is not very blameable; 'tis scarcely a passion but a weakness of the mind against which they have no defence, for as if Nature did not present to them sufficiently the too charming idea, their parents and acquaintance are careful to do so, while they take no pains to provide 'em with its antidote, which is reason."

"But love, sir, may be founded on reason," replied Esther with some return of spirit.

"Stuff, Bratikin! Reason shows the object either contemptible or worthy of some more solid sentiment, as esteem and friendship.

Esther sighed, dried her eyes and looked away.

"Do I not hear links at the door?" she asked.

"So you will not confide in your friend, Miss Essie? Yet he is older and wiser than you, and could either help to the accomplishment of your wishes, if they be wise, or cure you of 'em, if the contrary. Indeed I fancied I knew all your fellows, but I can't think of one of 'em that's worth a sigh of Miss Vanhomrigh's, or half good enough to be her husband."

Esther smiled faintly.

"What a farrago of nonsense is this we have been talking!" she said. "Let us hear no more of it."

The link-boys had thrust their torches into the rings outside, and the front door opened wide to admit a merry noise of tongues and a little crowd of people, first jostling each other as dark silhouettes against the glare of the links and the bright reflections on the wet pavement without; then, as they stepped into the lamplight of the narrow hall, transformed to glittering figures of gaily-dressed men and women. It was Madam Van and Molly, whom a party of the young lady's admirers on their way to the Fountain Tavern, had insisted on chairing home in spite of the state of the streets. Voices confused in mirth, Molly's clear laugh, and her mother's, scarcely less fresh and young, reached Esther's ears.

"Mercy on us! They have company with 'em," she cried, and darting out of the room, she banged the door behind her and fled hastily upstairs. But the company, after a playful dispute as to the chairman's fare, which, according to them ought to have been nothing less than Miss Molly's slipper to drink her health out of, departed to the tavern, probably to drink their own health twenty times over out of more ordinary and convenient goblets. The two ladies came tripping upstairs, with the gleam and rustle of silks and the tap of little heels, bringing with them into the quiet, dimly-lighted back-parlour an atmosphere of festivity and the great world.

"Well, madams all, where have you been gadding to?" asked Swift, when the first greeting had been exchanged.

"O sir, no further than Lady Wentworth's in St. James' Square," replied Mrs. Vanhomrigh, "or I warrant the young sparks wouldn't have troubled to carry *my* old bones hither, however they might have treated Molly's young ones." And she cast a glance of maternal pride at her charming Moll, so pretty in her peach-coloured lute-string, with the smile of pleasure and raillery still brightening her eyes and dimpling her soft cheeks. "But pray, Doctor, what have you done with Hess?"

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Governor Huff has a headache, or the vapours,

or some such thing. If I was you, madam, I would never mind her but take an orange."

"Doctor, you are a barbarian. The vapours, indeed! Sure my poor girl is very sick or she'd never have left you so uncivilly. Ann, Ann! Feathers and my hartshorn-drops."

"No no, mamma. What would they be for? She a'nt in a swoon," interrupted Molly, endeavouring to restrain her mother.

"Don't be saucy, miss. How do you know what she's in? Anyway, feathers is good to burn, for they can do no harm. My vinaigrette—where is it? Sure 'twas here I put it. No? Then there's fairies in this house." And whirling round the room in search of the missing vinaigrette, which was all the while in her pocket, she caught her heel in a hole in the carpet and stumbled forward, her slipper flying high in the air behind her. "Confound my shoe!" she cried. "'Tis the third time this evening. Slip it on quick, darling Moll. Hess will wonder I do not come."

"If she has a bad head, mamma, she had rather be left alone," said Molly.

"For shame, miss!" replied Mrs. Van, stamping her foot down into her shoe, which was too small, "I trust her own mamma knows best what she likes."

So upstairs she flew, with a step as light as that of a girl of twenty, and was immediately heard bursting into Esther's bedroom, brimming over with enquiries and condolences.

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders, and then: "Now sit down, Molkin, pray," he said, "and let us be cosy together, since there is no Governor Huff to tear your eyes out."

"But what is the matter with her?" asked Moll.

"Moll," returned he, leaning forward and speaking in an emphatic and mysterious voice, "I believe she's in love."

Molly started.

"Pooh! Mr. Bickerstaff," she said, after an almost imperceptible pause, "there never was such a man

as you for giving credit to your own inventions. I believe you was almost convinced Mr. Partridge was dead when you had written your tale of his decease, and thought him, I believe, pretty impudent for maintaining the contrary."

"Faith, Molkin, you shall not put me off with raillery," replied Swift. "You should know 'tis not a vulgar curiosity that makes me anxious to know whatever may concern you or her."

And he spoke the truth, for his curiosity was so closely connected with what was lovable in his nature, his feminine capacity for interesting himself in the whole, the utmost detail, of a life which had once attracted his interest, that it was not so much a defect as the underside of a quality—the same quality which made Lord Oxford's bitter independent pamphleteer, the unsparing critic of his political blunders, also his most sympathetic friend in domestic joy and sorrow, his truest in disgrace. But if the Doctor had been both clear-sighted and candid, he might have added that a touch of jealousy gave an edge to his curiosity. Molly had observed some little signs of this jealousy in him of late, and had misinterpreted it. Swift's jealousy was that of the exclusive friend who sees himself in danger of being bidden to go down lower in favour of the lover. Molly leaned back in a corner of a couch with her French hood thrown half off and played with her fan, looking at the Doctor demurely.

"Sure, Doctor," she said, "you know as much as I do. I am not the confidante nor the duenna."

"Stuff and nonsense, Moll! I'm confident you have noticed something, and if I were in your shoes I should be able to tell all about it. But you want penetration, Molkin. I'll be hanged if I can think of one of your fellows that Essie has distinguished more than another. True, there's a creature with a cocked hat, and a Ramilies wig, and his sleeve empty, I have seen walk in the Park with her of a morning lately."

"Captain Fortescue," returned Molly, "a very gallant young officer."

"May be, miss, but you'll never persuade me that

Hess could want taste so much as to be enamoured of a man without an arm. Monstrous! Besides, the fellow's illiterate. I heard her remark it."

"Then, sir, there's Mr. Charles Ford."

"Ford! O, I'm positive it's not Ford."

"But why not, sir? You tell us he is the finest scholar of any layman in England, and he has been mighty attentive to Essie."

"Has been, perhaps, but now is mighty attentive to another young lady, it being plain that Miss Essie cared not a jot for him. Moll, name some other followers you have seen about her of late."

"There is Sir James Bateman, the wealthy man with the palace in Soho; a fine scholar and a patron of the Arts, and one that always greatly affected Essie's society."

"What? The man that lately lost his lady? The inconsolable widower, and twice her age? Essie has more delicacy."

"Inconsolable, sir? Must I teach you what that means? And as to age he is scarce so old as yourself. Yet I do not say there is a match in it—I but humour your fancy by naming her followers."

"Molkin, you think to play with me, but I will not be put off so when I am serious. As to you, if you was brayed in a mortar like the fool you wot of, a grain or two of sense might be found in you, but not one of seriousness. Come now, since when has Essie been taken with the vapours?"

Molly paused before answering, and waved her Chinese fan slowly, studying the little porcelain-faced people upon it. Then for an instant a provoking smile played round the corners of her mouth, but it was gone before you could swear to it, and she said innocently: "Lord, now, how long is it since Cousin Francis went abroad?"

Swift started: "Molkin, you cannot mean to say —to hint—oh, 'tis impossible!"

Molly shrugged her shoulders.

"I told you, sir, I was not Essie's confidante, but she has certainly been splenetic and averse to company, and what you call vapourish, since he left.

And I take it as an odd thing that she has never spoken of him except once or twice to say 'twas a churlish way he left us, and to marvel that he hath not writ since; yet she was always extreme fond of him when he was at home."

"Essie would be extreme fond of a lame duck that she had had the nursing of, and think it the best fowl in the barn-yard."

"Yet I own," he continued, rising, "there's something in what you say, if 'tis true that pity is akin to love. But Lord, Lord! Essie in love with *him!* Why, 'tis Midsummer madness!"

"O, sir, as the world goes, it would be a poor match, but my sister has her fortune and will have more, and sure Francis is a good honest creature, though his tongue is none of the sweetest."

The Doctor poked the fire noisily.

"What!" he cried, "that little mean-looking sluttish fellow, not so much as come of honest parentage, as I have heard say? And your sister, as fine a lady as any woman of quality in the town, with so excellent an understanding and disposition, and handsome enough to please. Moll, Moll, here's a sad folly! Faith, miss, I had best wish you good-night or I shall grow splenetic."

So he put on his hat and tramped round the corner to Bury Street, while Molly ran upstairs to her mother's bedroom, took a leap on to the bed and sat there laughing. Mrs. Vanhomrigh, busy compounding some mysterious and horrible physic, asked her what her joke was.

"My dearest mamma, I have been persuading the Doctor that Essie is in love with—with—now guess."

Mrs. Vanhomrigh paused with a phial in her hand and turned a grave face to her daughter.

"O Molly, with whom?"

"I give you three guesses, mamma; you won't do it in thirty."

"A plague on your guesses, miss. Tell me at once."

"Why, mamma, with Cousin Francis."

And there was a simultaneous burst of laughter from the two ladies.

CHAPTER VIII.

"FLOWERS, fresh flowers! All a-growing and a-blowing! Who'll buy my flowers?"

Above the many cries of the London street, it rang out clear from the strong round throat of a country girl who sat on the steps of a City church with her wares about her. Her damask roses and white pinks were breathing as sweet a scent into the morning air as ever they did at Hammersmith, among the nightingales, and the large blossoms of forget-me-nots still looked as dewy fresh as when they hung clustering above their own blue reflections in the gliding Thames. The quality folk were not yet abroad, and the little knot of customers that kept accumulating and dispersing between the flower-girl on the steps and a costermonger's barrow in the street, consisted of a few citizens, marketing women and idle children. Presently a white-haired man joined them, hobbling noisily on a stick and pushing his way through the loiterers with a large iron key.

"By the Lord, Master Sexon," said a fat woman resentfully rubbing her arm, "it's to be hoped when we're corpses you'll treat us a bit more respectful."

"Rosemary sprigs, fair rosemary sprigs, twopence a score!" chanted the flower-seller.

"A plague on your rosemary!" cried a pert girl of fourteen. "Sexton an't going to a funeral or I guess he'd be in a better temper. 'Tis a wedding, I'll warrant. O I do love a wedding!"

An aged grandame who had drifted to the church steps and stood there leaning on her stick, with protruding under-lip and lack-lustre eye, apparently conscious of nothing but the sunshine, lifted her head and looked towards the speaker.

"Where is't, my dear," she asked almost eagerly. "I can't see nothing. I'd like to see the wedding. But marry come up! I've seen many and many a wedding—finer weddings nor you'll see now-a-days,

my dear. Scores and scores on 'em—fine, costly weddings and cake and wine plenty, and brides—ah, beautiful!"

Her flash of interest in the life about her faded again, and she looked away muttering to herself, either in mere emptiness of thought, or calling to mind the many and various brides whom in her ninety years she had seen pass to the altar, and on through the various circumstances of life, to old age and the tomb.

"Faith, dame, you're right," said the sexton. "Marrying you may see, little missie, and get a husband yourself if you're a good girl, but weddings—Lord! they ain't worth opening the church for, and if I was Parson, I'd go no further than a tombstone to string up these 'ere private marrying folks."

"Mercy on us! 'Tis a runaway match," cried the girl, jumping for joy to find herself in contact with so exciting an incident. The interest of the little feminine crowd, which had been awakened by the word "wedding," visibly quickened.

The sexton, who was suffering from rheumatism, hobbled up three steps before he found breath to answer. Then he turned round and addressed the company in general.

"Runaway match!" he repeated. "Deuce take 'em! No! If 'twere that there'd be small blame to 'em for marrying on the sly. No, what I cry shame on is the way decent folk, ay, quality folk too, that's been courting this twelvemonth, 'll come sneaking up to church in a hackney coach, master in a surtout and miss in a Mob, and not half-a-dozen people with 'em. And it's 'Pray Parson don't tell on us,' and, 'Be sure the rascal sexton holds his tongue,' and precious little we gets for our trouble—that I can tell you—precious little!" And he brought his stick down on the step with emphatic disgust.

"'Tis a shame, that it is!" cried the fat woman, forgetting her personal wrongs in her sympathetic indignation.

"Not a bite nor a sup do we get, ma'am, that I can tell you," continued the sexton, addressing himself to her.

"'Tis quite the mode, though," said a mercer's lady, lately own woman to a Baronet's wife, "for the very high quality does it pretty often, only they're married in their own chambers. But 'tis mighty provoking, I own, to know naught of the matter till you hear the drums under their window in the morning."

"'Tis enough to make one wish more funerals nor weddings," observed a saturnine female, related to a butcher, who was cheapening spring carrots. "At any rate there's good roast and biled for every one at 'em."

"Skinflintin, new-fangled ways!" ejaculated the sexton.

"Well, there's the reception next day," continued the mercer's lady meditatively, "and ribbon cockades more the mode than ever. Why, they do say my Lord Strafford's cost five guineas apiece."

"Who's going to be married, Master Sexton?" asked some one not interested in the business side of the question.

"A parson," replied the sexton. "Not one of your Church mice, that can't do things handsome if they would, but a fellow with a good fat living, and his lady a little fortin as they say."

"Is she a beauty?" asked the girl of fourteen, giggling. "I'd like to get a peep at her. Lord, how oddly she must be feeling!"

"Poor creature! I wish she might never feel worse!" said a handsome, haggard young woman, with a baby on one arm, a heavy basket on the other, and a second toddling child clinging to her skirts. "She's got her troubles before her."

"Come, neighbour Thomson, you'd best go away." said another, "or you'll be bringing bad luck on the bride, pretty dear, with your croaking."

"Go! Oh, you may be sure I'll go as fast as may be," replied neighbour Thomson. "I'd sooner run a mile nor see a wedding. It creeps down my back like cold water, it does."

Yet as a hackney coach rattled up to the church steps, she turned round to look with the rest. The first to jump out was a smart little lady in a riding-

dress; a camlet petticoat, a man's coat and waistcoat of scarlet cloth laced with silver, matched by the scarlet ribbon tying back her hair, a large lace cravatte, and a miniature beaver cocked defiantly. As regarded her dress, there was no reason why she should not be the bride, but somehow it was plain she was not. Next, stooping his stately head under the low lintel of the coach door, came an ecclesiastic in a new silk gown and a decorous but fashionable peruke. As he stood ready to hand out the two remaining ladies, the whispering spectators pronounced him a little old for his part, but a fine figure of a man for all that. The genteel woman who followed him must be the bride's mother, but the public interest centred in the tall young lady who descended last. She wore a white-flowered damask dress. It was a costume that would have been trying to many handsome women, especially in the bright morning sunshine, but the soft purity of her skin and the young curves of cheek and chin and throat triumphed over the hard whiteness of their surroundings. The sunshine without gilded her hair; an inner fire coming out to meet it helped to make her eyes so sparkling and her lips so red. There was a murmur of approval from the spectators.

"If you'll take my advice, Madam Van," said the Doctor, "you won't keep the coachman here, but get one called when the business is done, or he'll fleece you to the tune of a crown or two."

"I love to oblige, Mr. Dean," replied Madam Van. "But I've took your advice once too often already this morning. You was importunate we should start at once, and here I am with my stays but half laced." She pointed to a smart be-ribboned pair of those articles, which, as the fashion was, formed a visible part of her costume. "And, Molly, I vow, has caught up the worst pair of gloves in her box and forgot her patch and her fan, and——"

"Her perfume-flask and her snuff-box and the rest of her modish fal-lals, all for show and none for use," interrupted the Doctor. "So much the better, madams all, so much the better."

"And here we are," continued Madame Van, "we and nobody else, but the sexton trying to bring to a conclusion some very old quarrel with the church door."

For the sexton's rheumatic fingers were now wrestling with the large key and rusty lock.

"'Tis but poor housewifery, Mr. Dean, to save a crown on coach-hire, and waste thrice as much by spoiling your attire," said Molly.

Swift shrugged his shoulders and made as if he would stop his ears.

"Faith," he cried, "I have drawn an old house on my head! Go your own ways, hussies; throw your money down any gutter you please, and the good Doctor will not hinder you."

Fortunately for the supposed bridegroom's reputation with the crowd, who despise nothing so much as economy, his remarks had been made in a low voice, and their attention was fixed on the lady in white. She had stepped aside to look at the flower-girl's wares, and was now considering a bunch of deep red damask roses.

"Pish! child," said Swift, "those will never become thee! Lord, Lord! What will Moll and you do when the poor Doctor's gone, and there's no one to tell you when you look frightfully?"

He picked up a bunch of forget-me-nots and tried their effect against the white damask. "See here, miss, an't these the charmingest things? Odsbodikins! Enfeeble me if they an't the prettiest things for showing off a fair skin like your la'ship's, and cheap, dirt cheap at—I mean, what's the price, girl? You should give 'em me cheap for praising your wares better than you could do it yourself. Ah, why, why was I not a mercer? I should have got a fortune by this time, instead of an Irish Deanery. But no matter. Here's the posy for thee, Hess. So—stick it in your bosom just where your hood ties. 'Tis a pity your eyes are not blue, or I could make I know not what fine comparisons. But on my conscience there's not a penn'orth of blue in 'em."

The old grandame was standing at the foot of the

steps, bowed over her stick. Her dull gaze was fixed on Esther, and her tremulous under-lip had been moving for some time, but it was only now that audible words came.

"Bless you, bless you, my pretty mistress!" she cried in a hoarse feeble voice, stretching out her deeply-veined, wasted hand and arm. "Happy's the bride the sun shines on. And a beautiful bride you make, mistress, ay, that you do. Old Bess can tell you that—ninety years of age last Martinmas I am, your honours. It's a great age, a great age. Many's the bride I've seen married and buried and all, and by'r Lady, your good gentleman's in luck. God bless your honour, and give you many days and happy, you and your good lady there. Ninety years old I am, your honour, and hale and lusty for my years."

There was a murmur among the spectators, some echoing the crone's "God bless you," some her praise of the bride, others whispering their own remarks on the couple. While the poor old creature was speaking, Esther turned very pale, and then in a moment the carnation colour rushed over her face from brow to chin. A confused emotion between pleasure and terror and shame made her heart stand still, then give a great bound, and go on beating so loud it seemed to her that the bystanders must hear it. She bowed her face over her bouquet of forget-me-nots, as though she expected them to smell sweet, and made no reply either to Swift or to the old woman. The Dean, far from being embarrassed, seemed rather gratified at the mistake. He smiled slyly and felt for his purse, which always opened at the call of charity. Taking out a shilling he went down the steps and placed it in the crone's hand, folding her small claw-like fingers over it with his own.

"There's for your blessing, grandam," he said, "and I hope I and my good lady, as you call her, may deserve it, though indeed 'tis very doubtful if we do."

Then he bowed gravely to the admiring crowd and returned, delighted at the little mystification, and making a just perceptible grimace at Esther, as one

who was sure like himself to find it mighty pleasant.

Esther laughed awkwardly.

"Fie, Mr. Dean! Behave now, do! These good people will be angry when they find how they are deceived, and by a Dean too."

"I believe you are angry yourself, Governor Huff," he said. "You are are as red as a turkey-cock. Silly!"

Then he paid for the forget-me-nots and for some other flowers which he presented to Mrs. Vanhomrigh and Molly.

"'Tis a most profligate expenditure," he said. "But 'tis the last, the farewell extravagance, committed for the spendatious hussies of the sluttery sisterhood. Faith, it gives me short sighs to think on't."

A subdued sound of wailing and lamentation went up from Mrs. Vanhomrigh and Molly; decorously subdued because they were now entering the church. He waited for Essie to join in it, but she made no sign.

"Still angry, Governor Huff?" he asked in her ear. "Is it so unpardonable a crime for a luckless wretch, such as I, to play for a moment at being a happy man? Well, may you never know what 'tis to be miserable!"

"I do," she answered shortly in a deep tone, not looking at him but gazing straight before her.

"Tilly-vally!" he exclaimed; then checking himself—for was not this perhaps the last day of many days, which he was more loth than he had thought to bring to an end?—"Well, at least you know what 'tis to be happy."

A slow illuminating smile passed over Esther's face, and her eyes, though fixed on the same point, were wider.

"Yes," she answered.

"Ah! I do not. There's the difference," he replied bitterly.

Now the real bride and bridegroom drove up at the same moment to opposite doors of the church, but their arrival received only the amount of notice

that the crowd bestows on that of guests at a wedding. A *déshabillé*, or as it was called a Mob, was considered a very proper costume for a bride on such a private occasion, but it was not one to set off the scant and gawky charms of Miss Stone.

"Lord! An't she a pea-hen of a woman!" cried Molly to the Dean, as he hurried into the vestry to don his surplice. Molly had a habit of making audible remarks on persons in her near neighbourhood, but the same Providence which protects children and drunken men usually preserved her from being overheard. The Dean, who was punctiliously courteous in many respects, and had no claim on that particular Providence, answered by a frown so portentous that it made her seriously uncomfortable for some minutes. Mrs. Vanhomrigh meantime was in a delightful state of excitement, kissing every one within reach, and saying quite loud, as the bridegroom passed up towards the altar, "Lud, girls, I wish either of you may get as proper a fellow;" whereat Mr. Harris, a good-looking young man, fair and fresh and six foot two in his stockings, blushed very much. Being the kind of young man who always does and feels precisely what is expected of him, he was altogether as blushing and constrained as was proper to his position.

Now the church doors were locked, and the whole party, which consisted of little more than a dozen people, stood in the chancel. The Dean, clad in the short and dirty surplice of the parish clergyman, began reading the service in his most impressive manner, and the married ladies present, as used to be customary at weddings, began to cry. When the final exhortation, which the Dean read to the bride with unnecessary severity, was reached, Mrs. Vanhomrigh, gazing tearfully at her niece, whispered to Molly—

"'Tis just as I said, my dear, when your cousin was cheapening that gown at Delamode's. There's five guineas' worth of bad temper gone into them shoulders."

"There an't five guineas' worth of anything in the train," replied Molly, disdaining to whisper.

"Sh, child! You should pay attention to the prayers. Sure I hope the boy's going round to ask all the folks to dinner. Have you heard say whether Cousin Annesley's moved to his new house at Chelsea yet? 'Twould be plaguey provoking should he not get the invitation."

In marrying their daughter privately the Stones did what was usual with sensible persons of the middle class, who were averse to incurring the worry and expense of a public ceremony and the three or four days of pandemonium which succeeded it. On such an occasion the young couple would leave the church separately and meet again at a tavern or at the house of a friend, where they would dine and divert themselves with the small wedding party for the rest of the day, giving a reception at their own home on the following one. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had offered her house for this purpose, and the arrangement was equally agreeable to the Stones, to whom spending money at a tavern seemed little short of profligacy, and to Madam Van who dearly loved to see company and to play a part, no matter how humble, in a wedding. So private an affair was repugnant to her, but she consoled herself by planning the fine doings there should be when her own daughters were married, and by inviting as many relatives as could be got together at a few hours' notice.

Swift resisted all pressure to join the party at dinner, boldly alleging his dislike of the crowd, the heat, the superabundant food and drink, and the time-honoured wit that he would be certain to find there. He came in later to taste the bridecake and take a dish of tea, but he looked gloomy and preoccupied.

"Call you this privacy, Madam Van?" he asked, looking round the crowded room. "'Tis as public as an auction."

"A fig for your privacy! 'Tan't privacy they want, 'tis cheapness," returned the heated and radiant Madam Van. "Yet 'twould be a pity if the drums, poor creatures, couldn't get wind of the matter. Live and let live, say I."

"Oh, pray live, madam, if you find any amusement in it, and let anything else live except the drums. They may fitly beat a quick march for a couple of simpletons into the battle of married life, but why should they confoundedly punish every unoffending creature in the neighbourhood?"

"Mr. Dean, you're one of them stout pagans that make the stoutest Christians, when they're converted. Let's drink to your conversion. Hess, child, fill the Doctor out a dish of tea. Lord! how finely he read the service this morning!"

"No thanks to Moll," returned the Dean, "with her comparison of the pea-hen. Do but look at the bride-thing there, with her strut and her neck and her nose! A pea-hen! 'Twas a wonder I did not say in the midst of the business, 'Moll, you are an agreeable wretch!'"

"So 'twas Moll you was thinking of all the time," said Esther. "Sure she's high in favour to engross your thoughts even in church."

"She did not *engross* my thoughts, Miss Essie," returned Swift in a lower key. "What! D'ye think, with the Archbishop, I have no religion?"

"Why do you think about Moll in church, sir? 'Twas a thankless sin, for she does not bestow a thought upon you."

"Now you are jealous as the devil! There's another person I think of in church sometimes, Hesskin," he added gravely, "and pray for us both together, that we may be delivered from the spleen and live in charity with our neighbours. I pray the Almighty very earnestly that He may make us both more content and better Christians than we are; and since He does not require informing so much as most prayer-makers believe, I leave it to Him to decide which of us lacks most in doctrine and which in practice."

Here the bride, too elated by her position and the unusual dimensions of the men of the Harris family, to be afraid of the Dean of St. Patrick's, came up with her mother to thank him for officiating.

"Sure, sir, my father-in-law—the fine big old gentle-

man yonder, who you may have heard tell of in the City—protests you are so fine a man that when he came into church he took you to be an Archbishop. Lord! we would not for the world have been married by the little scrub parson of the parish, no higher than Moll there. Such folks shouldn't be in the Church; 'tis impossible to reverence 'em."

"Certainly, madam," replied the Dean, "if promotion were measured out fairly to the clergy, so much to every square inch of 'em, I might hope by a generous diet to fit myself for a bishopric *in partibus Infidelium*—which means Ireland, you know—and I trust, but I cannot be sure, that your housewifery would be good enough to bring Mr. Harris to the primacy before very long."

"Sir, your most obleeged," replied the young lady, curtseying. "Mr. Harris will be vastly obleeged when he hears your good opinion of him."

"Yes, I have a good opinion of Mr. Harris, madam. I think him a worthy and amiable young man and an excellent clergyman, and I trust you will always submit to him and esteem him as greatly your superior in wisdom and in virtue, as both reason and duty bid you to do. Yet do not, as many wives use, tease him with a foolish fondness which he cannot be expected to reciprocate. For you must not forget, madam, that however a lover may talk of charms and raptures, marriage puts a sudden and complete end to the ridiculous illusion of what is called Love. But I trust 'twas no more than a reasonable liking that instigated this match of yours and Mr. Harris's."

The unlucky object of his homily looked by this time inclined to cry, and Esther plucked him by the sleeve. So he wound up his remarks more mildly. "Endeavour then to become worthy of your husband's friendship and esteem; for this is the only means by which you can make marriage a blessing rather than a curse."

"Good Heaven, sir!" exclaimed Esther in a low voice, as the disconcerted bride retreated, "will you never be tired of preaching homilies against women and marriage? Sure you must consider both of more

importance than you pretend, or you would talk of 'em less. You may hector your brides of quality to your heart's content, but I do not love to have you frighten my cousin on her wedding-day, and in my mother's house."

Swift shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

"Oh, I cannot abide a fool, Brat. You should not have let you cousin be a fool, if you wanted me to be civil to her. But I cry you mercy; only do not let the Governor chide too much to-day, lest we should part in unkindness."

The truth was that on returning to his lodgings from the church, he had found a note from the gentleman with whom he proposed to ride on his journey as far as Chester, telling him to be ready to start on the morrow should they call for him. Amid all the bitterness and humiliation of his exile, for as such he reckoned his promotion to the Deanery of St. Patrick's, it added greatly to his depression, to think that he must now part in a very definite manner from these friends who had made him a kind of home in London. Brilliant, interesting, intoxicating as had been the three years of his life there, to one of his sensitive nature they would have been far less happy without the background of that hospitable house of neighbour Van's, where he might keep his gown when necessary and find it mended, and dine on a wet day, and pass those odd hours when he could not love his own company, chiding, instructing, being chidden and worshipped by three women, each in her own way above the common. The hour had come when these pleasant relations must cease, and he delayed to say farewell because like most English people, he shrank from a set scene of emotion, and also because in the back of his mind there floated a vague consciousness which he utterly refused to crystallise into thought; a consciousness that there was something more serious and complex in these relations than he had intended, and that breaking them off would not be quite so natural and easy as he had always supposed it would be. He was exceedingly sensitive to all claims upon him,

and perhaps for that very reason shrunk from allowing them to be set up. This feeling was not the source of his resolution against marriage, but it helped very much to strengthen it. He imagined that by avoiding that particular bond he avoided giving to any one person a dominant claim upon his life; his mind accepted this superficial reasoning, but his heart had too much "intelligence of love," to be wholly deceived by it. He had taken the responsibility of a woman's life when he had brought Esther Johnson, then a beautiful and attractive girl, to Ireland; when he had made himself so completely and obviously the centre of her existence that her marriage with another was impossible from her own point of view and from that of any lover but one of very dull perceptions. When, on the appearance of such a lover, he had, while pretending to listen to his application for Mrs. Johnson's hand, practically discouraged him, and in private ridiculed him to the lady of his choice with all the bitterness of a jealous rival. He would not for the world have acknowledged that in acting thus he had given her at least as strong claims upon him as he would have done by making her his wife. Yet when he said to himself that his return to P.pt. meant the end of his intimacy with the Vanhomrighs, it was to those unacknowledged claims that he yielded.

He had not yet made up his mind in what fashion he might best let Esther Vanhomrigh know that this was in all probability their last meeting, when Mrs. Stone brought up several relatives to be introduced to the Dean of St. Patrick's and to congratulate him on his promotion. Others who were slightly acquainted with him, but had not met him since the news of it was public, came round to add their congratulations, which he received with a genial grace, as though he were indeed immensely pleased at his own good fortune. Esther had seen this little comedy before, but continued to be impatient of it. She herself neither could nor would dissimulate her sentiments or opinions, and it seemed to her undignified for this greatest of men to be pretending

gratitude ıor, delight in, what was really a slight, almost an insult. For had not his obscured predecessor in the Deanery been put into a Bishopric merely to keep him out of it? So she loudly declared herself unable to congratulate Dr. Swift on an appointment so unequal to his deserts, banishing him as it did from the civilized world, and unable to believe him so ignorant of his own merit as to be content with it. Swift was as proud as herself in his way, but more worldly wise, and he was evidently displeased at her intervention, though it brought him in a harvest of hollow compliments from the bystanders.

Mrs. Vanhomrigh, standing at a little distance, could not perceive this jar; she only saw the Dean and Esther the centre of an animated group, and Molly at the harpsichord in the back parlour with a contingent of emulous admirers, each and all bent on turning over her music. If anything could have put her in higher spirits than before, these two sights would have done so. Now that she had made Mrs. Stone every possible compliment on the appearance, manners and prospects of the bride and bridegroom, she observed:

"My stars! How we shall miss the good Doctor —Dean, I should say— when he crosses that nasty puddle yonder! He's the good-naturedest man in the world, as you may have seen for yourself, sister."

"Well, you know him best, sister Vanhomrigh," replied Mrs. Stone bluntly. "But he seems to me a rather sour-spoken gentleman. 'Twas enough to terrify anybody, let alone a bride, the way he spoke to Sarah."

"'Tis just his downright way," returned Mrs. Vanhomrigh. "He's all candour, all straightforwardness, Susan—not one of your mealy-mouthed gentlemen that's full of slipperiness and deceptions. When a woman's been as much in the world as I have, she will not trust your smooth fellows." And Madam Van shook her pretty bright-eyed head wisely, as one who lived in a deep and continual state of suspicion of her fellow-mortals.

"Well, sister, 'tis an odd thing to hear a clergyman speak so of holy matrimony. I hope your Esther may bring him to better dispositions."

"He might be in better, Sue, and he might be in worse, for he might not consider the matter at all," replied Mrs. Vanhomrigh. "However, I'm not one of them that's anxious to rid themselves of their dear daughters, and I believe there's no man they can marry but I shall often wish 'em at home again."

"I must bid you farewell, Madam Van," said the Dean coming up with an artificial air of ease, "and that very like, for a long time. I am told to hold myself in readiness for a start to-morrow, if it should prove convenient to my friends who purpose to ride with me. I will not make long speeches and talk wisely, lest Moll there should overhear me and laugh. Farewell, madam, and God bless you and yours!"

He shook hands warmly with the Vanhomrighs, bowed to the rest of the company and vanished, saying to himself as he went down the stairs, that partings being disagreeable things it was better for all parties to get the business done as quickly and publicly as possible, so that there might be neither time nor place for tiresome compliments and conventional expansions of sentiment.

So he went home to Bury Street, pleased to have got the thing over and determined to resist the tide of black and bitter melancholy which was rising in his mind at the prospect of his departure.

Meantime in St. James' Street his leave-taking did not give such satisfaction. Mrs. Vanhomrigh was in a few respects the woman of the world she loved to think herself in all, and after the first loud expressions of surprise and regret, she let the company know that she was not in reality very much surprised, and felt sure the Dean would be back again before long. And this was not far from the truth, for Swift had already delayed going to Ireland longer than was expected, and no one believed he would stay there. For Esther, it was as though the world had suddenly shattered round her. He was gone. It was incredible. Another might still have considered the company pres-

ent, but for her whose nature it was to be always concentrated on one point, they did not exist. She stood where he had left her, deadly pale and mechanically opening and shutting her fan. Some one spoke to her, but she did not return any answer, and Molly observed the speaker, who was Aunt Stone's younger son, exchange a sneering smile with his sister Anna, Moll came up to her sister, and rearranging a knot of her ribbons said : "You should not have been standing all this while, when you was so poorly yesterday. Come into the back parlour, for Cousin Edward and Mr. Tom Harris are setting out a table for 'One and Thirty.' Do you not love a round game, Anna?"

The Vanhomrigh ladies were too fond of conversation to be ardent card-players, though for fashion's sake they were obliged to set out tables when they had company. Esther hated a round game, but she submitted to being put down to the table, where she played with conspicuous inattention to her cards and her money. Before the game was half over there came an urgent message from the Dean, saying he had dropped a folded slip of paper from his pocket, and that it was of the utmost importance it should be found. He sent a tiny note to Esther, which she opened with a throb of expectation, but it only contained the words—"Lost the key to a cipher. Seek! Seek!! Seek!!!"

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a thorough search made round the two parlours and on the stairs, but no paper was to be found. It was decided that the Dean must have dropped it between St. James' Street and Bury street, and the party settled down as before, with the exception of Esther. When the search had proved in vain, she remembered seeing a folded piece of paper lying by the altar rails in church, close by where the Dean stood. Sending welcome injunctions to Patrick, the Dean's footman, to join the revels below

stairs, she ran up for her hood and gloves and left the house as quickly and as quietly as she could. The dusty streets were beginning to be shady and were comparatively quiet, for it was not much past five o'clock, and the fashionable world had not yet left its after-dinner wine for the coffee-house, the tavern or the Mall. Yet had they been noisier they would have seemed a haven of peace to Esther, a fugitive from the crowded stage of conventional merriment in which she had been playing her part for so many hours. She turned down by St James's Palace into the Mall, where a certain number of people were already walking, and so past the milk fair at the corner to Spring Gardens. Thence she took a hackney coach to the Rectory, near the quiet church the Stones had chosen for the wedding. The Rector, whose dinner had been large, if not luxurious, sat over his empty bottle of Florence wine smoking a pipe of tobacco, and though he wondered much what Miss Vanhomrigh might want with the church key, he sent it down by the maid without exerting himself to formulate a question. So she went on to the church. The flower-seller had gone from the steps, and the costermonger's cart from below them. Some grimy children were playing at marbles by the door, and interrupted in their game by the unexpected arrival, gathered round to stare at her, as she painfully turned the big key in the lock, with a faint exclamation of annoyance as she split the palm of her glove in the process. She had no sooner entered than a pale, inquisitive, snub-nosed little face, about on a level with the lock, was thrust in after her. She hastily withdrew the key and closed the door behind her. There was something strange and unnatural about the emptiness of the place, with the long rays of the afternoon sun streaming above its untenanted pews and bulging hassocks and cushions. The church smelt of dust, for it was not sufficiently fashionable to be open for those daily prayers which were wont to offer a convenient *rendezvous* for the beau and the fine lady. It had none of the dim impressiveness of a mediæval

church, that seems reared with a view to Heaven rather than Earth, and whose arches, massive or soaring, neither gain nor lose by the accidental presence of ephemeral human creatures below them. No—the building seemed to cry out for a congregation, and the mind's eye involuntarily peopled it with its Sunday complement of substantial citizens and their families.

Esther walked quickly up to the altar rails and looked over. There lay the folded paper, just as she remembered it. She fell on her knees on the long stool placed there for the convenience of communicants, not with any idea of reverence, for Esther was a philosopher after the fashion of the day, but merely in order to reach the paper with greater ease. She snatched it up and glanced at it. Yes, it was undoubtedly the lost key. Tossing her head with a little "Ah!" of triumph and satisfaction, she put it away safely in her pocket. The prize was secured, yet she lingered, ungloved her left hand, and touched a spot of ground just within the rails, pressing her warm palm and shapely fingers down upon the cold stone. Just there Swift had stood, so close to where she knelt that if he stood there now his robes would brush her as he moved. She hid her face on the arm that lay on the communion-rails, and with a thrill of passionate adoration saw once more the impressive figure that she had seen that morning, and heard again the grave tones of his voice. The sensation of bustle attendant on a wedding, the near presence of the little crowd of relations, had robbed the scene of its emotional quality at the time, but now she was fully sensible of its significance. She was kneeling just where the bride had knelt, and for her the recollection of the stupid, vulgar girl, who had been round to St James' so often lately with tiresome questions about millinery, faded before the realisation of the woman's heart that she had seen beating a few hours ago, on the spot where her own beat now—not more full, surely not so full of love and pride in the man beloved, but blest in a completed joy that was not Esther's yet. Might it not one

day be hers also? A minute or two only she continued kneeling, and then passed down the aisle and out on to the steps like a somnambulist, pale, with wide eyes and close-pressed brooding lips. Another person so rapt might have forgotten to lock the door or else to return the church key to its owner; but Esther's methodicalness, a natural quality cultivated in response to Swift's approval, never forsook her, and quite mechanically she struggled with the massive lock and left the key at the clergyman's house with a message of thanks.

As she called a coach she asked herself with a start whether she had done these things; then smiled and blushed at her own self-absorption. Up till now she had had no definite purpose beyond that of finding the lost paper, and having accomplished this, she was going home again. But now, smiling, she thought: "Patrick will be drunk by this time—at least, if he is not yet drunk he will not, in justice to himself, leave such a feast until he is. I had better take it myself."

It seemed a simple and natural thing to do, but though Swift received the Vanhomrighs at his lodgings as often as any other friends, that did not mean very often; and she knew he hated to be unexpectedly invaded by any one, most of all by ladies. Yet to lose this opportunity of finding out the truth about this sudden departure would be too tantalising. It must be only one of those foolish mystifications by which he loved to throw dust in the eyes of his acquaintance, and to which she had become almost resigned. As she drove on the desire to see him, to ask him a thousand questions such as he would not answer before others, and to extract from him a promise to write, grew till it became a necessity. So she got down at the corner of Bury Street, and flew on to the well-known door. She did not observe Mr. Erasmus Lewis, who was passing through the street on the other side, but he observed her and her destination. On the door-step she paused, struck with sudden terror at finding herself entering uninvited that presence which could sometimes be so

awe-inspiring. Then, with a touch of scorn at her own unreasoning vacillation, she resolutely raised the knocker. No one came in answer to her rap, but she found that the door was on the latch, and went in. The doors of most of the rooms stood wide open and there was a feeling of loneliness about the dull little house. She went upstairs and knocked timidly at Swift's parlour, but here too no one answered. The bedroom beside was obviously empty, and with an inconsequent sensation of relief she said to herself he must be gone out, and peeped carelessly into the parlour. It was a dreary room at the best of times, and now it bore all those marks of disorder and discomfort that attend a move, even from lodgings. A large wooden case half full of books stood near the door, the floor and the chairs were strewn with volumes and those shabby odds and ends which seem never to appear except on such occasions; while the hearthstone and empty grate were piled with an immense heap of papers, mostly torn up very small. The cloth had fallen off the heavy old oak table, which filled the middle of the room and was generally completely covered with books and pamphlets. It was quite bare now, except that the man who sat at one end on a high stool had bowed his body on it and lay face downwards on its polished surface, with arms and tightly-clenched hands stretched out before him. He was wrapped in a loose gown, and wore neither peruke nor cap, but his head, which must have been left unshaven for some time, was covered with a short thick growth of blue-black hair dashed with glittering silver at the temples. As Esther stood by the door, amazed and undecided, a sound broke from him; a groan, ending in a long, low, sighing wail. It was a heart-broken sound; the cry of one worn out with some intolerable misery of mind or body. In an instant all hesitation disappeared, all fear or desire for herself; everything vanished except the consciousness of her adored friend's anguish. She moved forward quickly and silently, and falling on her knees by the table laid her hand on his arm. He made no sign,

but again that muffled wail broke forth, like the lamentation of a damned spirit. Trembling excessively, she pulled him by the sleeve, and said in a voice so broken it was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Oh, sir! For pity's sake—for God's sake——!"

With an impatient movement he folded his arms round his head so as more completely to shield his face, and spoke hoarsely from beneath them: "You confounded rascal, I thought you knew better! Go—go—go, I say!"

The last words were spoken with increasing vehemence. But Esther, who had often been awe-struck before him, did not fear him now. He was suffering, how or why she knew not, and without her reverence for him being in any way impaired, he awoke her instinctive feeling of responsibility towards all suffering creatures. The first shock over, she was comparatively calm again, only thinking with painful intensity what she had better do. So for a minute or two they both remained in the same position, till he burst out again with greater violence than before:

"Knave! Beast! Idiot! Go, go!"

Then she touched his hand. "It is Hess," she said.

He lifted his head slowly and turned his face towards her, as though with reluctance. It was pale with the livid pallor of a dark skin no longer young, and the firm lines of mouth and cheek were slackened and hollowed. He looked a ghost, but hardly the ghost of himself. In a minute, as he realised Esther's presence, the life and individuality began to return to his face, but in no amiable form.

"So, madam," he said after a pause, with a grimace that did duty for a smile, "*you* are here! Ha! Charming! Pray, to what am I indebted, *et cætera?*"

Esther was too much shocked at his appearance to consider how he received her.

"I have brought the paper you lost," she returned hastily. "'Tis here. But no matter—you are ill. You must let me find your drops for you and send for Dr. Arbuthnot."

He sat upright, and clutching the edge of the stool on which he sat with both hands, "I am not ill," he said with harsh impatience. "Leave me."

"You are either ill or in some great trouble," she replied, "in either case not fit to be alone. If you will not have my company, you must let me send you some other friend—though a truer one it cannot be. Patrick will only come home to sleep off his wine."

"Friend!" he cried, "Friend!"

And with a shriek of laughter he rocked himself to and fro on the stool. Esther was standing up now; she looked at him steadily, with a severity born rather of amazement than of any conscious criticism of his conduct, and he was calm again so instantaneously that she almost doubted whether it was he who had laughed. They were silent for a minute or two, looking at each other. He was apparently calm, but the singular blueness of his eyes had disappeared; they glittered under the heavy black eyebrows, each with a curious spark in it, not at all like the azure eyes so familiar to his friends. The change in them made his whole face look different; from having been pale, it had now flushed a dark red.

"You talk to me of friends, child," he resumed hoarsely, but in a more normal tone, leaning forward and smiling at her bitterly, both his hands still clutching the stool, "as though you expected *me* to believe in 'em, or to fancy *you* believed in 'em. No, no, Governor Huff has too much wit for that. Friends! Fellows that suck your brains, suck 'em dry, dry, and pay you with their damned promises; that when you've slaved and slaved and made a million enemies, and when they think you're done with, fling you out an Irish Deanery, as you might fling a stick into the sea for your dog—'Hi! Swim for it, sir!'" He paused a moment, moistened his dry lips, and drawing in his breath let it out again in a low fierce exclamation. "But 'tis not I, 'tis they who are done with—Oxford, Bolingbroke. Puppets! Pawns on the board! Oh, when I am gone, they'll know themselves and whistle me back, when 'tis too late. And I shall come, ay,

blundering fool that I am, I shall come. The moths —do you remember at Kensington, Hess?—they come back to frizzle where they frizzled before, don't they?"

He laughed again the same sudden shrieking laugh. The perpendicular line was defining itself on Esther's white brow; a line which looked severe, but really indicated only anxiety or bewilderment.

"I esteem your political friends as little as you do," she replied, mentioning them disdainfully, "and thought I esteemed 'em less. But you have others—better ones—Mr. Gay, Mr. Pope——"

"Mr. Addison—Mr. Steele,"—he broke in with a mincing accent meant to imitate her feminine voice. "Was that what you was going to say, miss? Ha, ha, ha! Warm-hearted, generous Joseph! Steele, true as —thyself! Gay, now—Gay's a charming fellow when one feels charmingly. As to Pope"—at that name he dropped his sneer and spoke with sombre earnestness —"as to Pope—never talk of him, Hesskin. He's a thing I believe in, I *will* believe in, I tell you, Brat—so don't let's think of him for fear—for fear—— Ah! Did you say he was crooked?"

"I said nothing, sir," she replied with dignity; "I would aim at no man's defects of person, least of all at Mr. Pope's. But if I cannot name a man friend but you'll mock at him, I'll bring your women friends to your mind—the truest, the most attached of 'em." And she held her head higher. "There's Lady Betty Germayne, my mother, Molly and—myself. That's four."

"Women's friendship! Women's friendship! By the powers, she talks as though it were a thing to be calculated—four female friendships to one male. Pshaw! Weigh froth! Weigh moonshine! They're more weighable than the parcel of vanity and caprice called female friendship. Don't I know why Madam Van and you were all anxiety to know Mr. Gay before I left? Why, to be sure, she must have a poet in her ante-chamber like other women of quality; for Madam Van is as mad as old Newcastle and thinks herself a duchess. And when that poor Dean that's been so useful is gone, why, he's gone, and Hess

must get another fellow to teach her how to talk and make the wits in love with her. Ay, I know what your female friendship's worth."

Esther stood upright beside him. She made no visible motion while he spoke, but she held her head higher, the frown on her brow deepened, and she looked down at him with eyes, in which an angry light began to burn, and cheeks flushing with an indignant red. He tried to meet her gaze indifferently as he finished speaking, but his own sank beneath it, and before she made any answer he hung his head as one rebuked.

"You dare to say so!" she said at last sternly. "And to me!" Then after a pause—"Unworthy! Most unworthy!" she ejaculated.

Her words did not exactly represent her feeling. She was more moved by horror and surprise that he should speak in a way so unlike and so degrading to himself than at his preposterous reflections on herself and Mrs. Vanhomrigh. But whatever the precise proportion in which her emotions were mingled, she stood there the very image of intense yet self-contained indignation, fixing upon him a steady look of stern reproof. She who had so often trembled before his least frown did not fear his fury now, in this feverish sickness of his soul. He was silent, looking at the table and drumming on it like a boy, half sullen, half ashamed. Then on a sudden, putting both hands to his head with a contortion of pain, "O my head! my head!" he cried. "O God!—O God!"

And he rolled on the table in a paroxysm of anguish, moaning inarticulately either prayers or curses. Every physical pang that he endured created its mental counterpart in her, and her whole soul was concentrated in a passionate prayer, if a spiritual cry so vague in its direction could be called a prayer, for help for the body and mind of him laid there in anguish and disarray.

At length the paroxysm subsided, almost as suddenly as it had come, but for a time he seemed unable to speak. Shading his brow with his hand, he looked at her from time to time with a faint, pleading,

almost timid smile. This piteous smile, so unlike any look she had ever seen or fancied on those haughty features, was more than Esther could bear. Her breath came quick, a strangling sob rose in her throat, and the hot tears blinded her eyes. But he had too often, quite mistakenly, praised her as above the female weakness of tears, and she had too often blushed to think of those tears of hers by the river at Windsor, and those in the Sluttery, to weep again in his company. No, she would rather choke than do it. So she could not answer that pleading look with a kind one, but faced him with drooped eyelids, lips severely close, flushed cheeks and heaving bosom. He spoke at last in a languid, hesitating voice, but calm and like his own; no longer with the confused articulation or the fierce grinding tones which had shocked Esther when he was talking to her before.

"I beg your pardon, Essie, very humbly, yours and good Madam Van's as well. You'd grant me grace if you only knew what a bad head I have. Oh, such a racking head, Hess! 'The pains of hell gat hold upon me, last night when I came home from Parson's Green, and all because of the least bit of fruit from his glass-house the mad Peterborough would have me to eat. No, I'll not do it again—fruit always did give me a bad head. You've forgiven me, Brat, ha'n't you?"

But Esther could not yet answer or meet that anxious, humble look of his.

"Essie!" he cried pleadingly, "Essie!" and stretched out his hand towards hers as though to touch it, yet without doing so.

"Hess!" he cried again. "What! You can't forgive your poor friend that hardly knows what he says when he cries aloud in his misery? Can't you forgive me, little Hesskin? Do—do now forgive me."

Esther was still kneeling like one in prayer with her cheek leaned on her clasped hands, but now the colour had ebbed from it and left her very pale, and the resolute lines of her lips had softened. She lifted to his her great eyes, luminous with tears repressed and an irrepressible fire of passion, and he started as he met them.

"Forgive you?" she cried in a voice whose deep vibrating music thrilled him in spite of himself; and then the same words again, but set to some new harmony—"Forgive you? Why, I love you!"

The mental shock was sufficient to have thrust him back again into that Inferno from which he had just escaped, but it had the opposite effect. The weak, helpless feeling in the brain, that usually remained with him for long after such an attack, passed suddenly almost entirely away. Yes, it was a shock. For weeks a dim troubling something, to which he obstinately refused to give the shape of an idea, had been stirring in the depths of his mind; and he had kept it down there by main force. Now it sprang up before him, full-armed, like Minerva.

"I am obliged to you, Essie," he said. "I should have been sorry if I had offended you past your forgiveness. But now you talk as wildly as I did. Had we not been friends so long, I might misunderstand your meaning."

"Ah!" she cried, leaping to her feet, and tossing back her hood with a fierce, impatient gesture, "you wish to misunderstand it! You that have plagued me, tortured me with your questions, now you would fain not hear the answer to 'em all. You that have told me a thousand times to show you my heart, now you will not see it. But you know, you know what you are to me"—and a tearless sob strangled her voice.

"Your friend, Essie," he said gravely, flinching before this outburst of a passion it had been beyond his power to imagine.

"Friend!" she cried, "Friend!" and laughed, not bitterly, but with a kind of wild tenderness. "Could Adam call the God that shaped him out of dust his 'friend'? No, he must worship, he must adore Him. You shaped me. I was nothing, nothing, before you taught me how to think, how to feel, and to love what you love and despise what you despise. I am the creature of your hands—you made me and I am yours. You may be sorry for't, but 'tis too late now to help it."

Swift made an attempt to assume that awful air with which he was wont to cow the boldest of his friends or foes, but he felt the attempt to be a failure.

"Hush, Essie!" he cried. "What you are saying is very wrong; 'tis rank blasphemy, and I will not hear it."

Esther turned from him and paced the room for a minute or two in a silence which Swift did not break, with her head thrown back, and biting her under-lip, as was her wont. Looking on the ground, not at him, who had once more shaded his face with one hand, she began again:

"We are neither of us enthusiasts, and I cannot pick my words. O that I could find one sharp enough to cut right through my breast and show you my heart! Once you said I should cease to be your friend on the day when I was afraid to pin my heart to my sleeve-ruffles. Yes, those were your very words—'pin it to my sleeve-ruffles,' for your inspection. You forget, but I remember. Now you don't love to see it, but 'tis too late to go back. If I said I worshipped you as one worships God, I spoke wrongly. God is a long way off, and we have never seen Him, but we know He cannot need us. But you"—she paused before him with clasped hands, like a worshipper before a shrine—"you are far indeed above other men, yet you are a man, and here among us, and you have often—— Ah! do not try to deny it—little, nothing as I am compared to you, you have often, often needed me! How can I choose but worship, adore,—love you?"

And as she ended, she fell on her knees once more, and bending over his hand, that still lay stretched out on the table, touched it with a swift hot kiss, and bowed her forehead on her folded arms.

There was a sharp tap at the door. Some one must have mounted the stairs unheard by either of them. Quick as lightning Esther sprang up and pulled her hood over her face. Swift made a dash for his peruke, which lay on a neighbouring chair, but he had not got his head well into it, when the door was flung open, and loudly announced by an invisible some one, Mr. Erasmus Lewis walked in.

CHAPTER X.

THE new Deanery at St. Patrick's was a spacious house altogether and had a spacious kitchen, proportioned to the lavish hospitality of the ex-Dean Sterne who had built it. Now the handful of fire penned up in a corner of the big grate seemed to blink ruefully at the very scanty supply of pots and pans that was stretched out in attenuated rows on the big dresser opposite. Time had been when the ruddy glow of a long bank of red coals was reflected from a whole battalion of copper vessels, jostling and mounting on each other for want of space, whilst great gaudy porcelain tureens standing beneath them had suggested more immediate visions of company and good cheer. But the new arrangements were Mrs. Johnson's own, and their very scantiness made them her pride. The Dean would have to allow that not a superfluous penny had been spent. Yet the bills were plaguey deep for all that, and he who was so particular about his expenditure would expect a very exact account to be kept, and the correct balance to be handed over. Now Mrs. Johnson, being born of poor and careful parents and also in every respect the Dean's faithful pupil, was a severe economist, but cyphering was to her a very serious matter. So now while she was mixing a certain favourite cake in preparation for his expected return, she kept studying with an anxious brow a little pocket account-book and occasionally the contents of a purse. For the balance was not right, and though a portion of her income came from the Dean, and she would willingly have sacrificed her last sixpence to him as a gift, she would not have defrauded herself of a penny in a matter of business, to gain him any earthly advantage; an idiosyncrasy of which he had no right to complain, as it was due to his own training, though in himself a stronger reasoning faculty often inter-

vened to traverse and control such follies. She had just received a letter from Swift written at Chester, and Dingley had gone round to the owners of the craft on board which his passage was taken, to know when it might be expected.

There was a sound of pattens in the passage, for though it was June the weather was rainy. Esther Johnson lifted her doughy hands out of the cake and hoped she would have time to run round to Ormond's Quay and change her dress before Pdfr. should arrive.

"Lud, my dear, 'tis terrible stormy weather!" cried Dingley, coming in without her pattens, but with the wreck of a big oilskin umbrella in her hand. "'Tis a wonder I an't blown away. For pity's sake look at your umbrella."

"Well, Dingley, well?"

"Sure, Hetty, I'm vastly concerned about it. But a scurvy puff of wind caught it as I came round the corner of Bride Street, and there it was turned round and staring me in the face as you might say."

"For God's sake never mind the umbrella, D.! When will he be here?"

"Oh, immediately almost; to-morrow evening at latest."

"*Immediately*, i' faith! Why, how comes the plaguey ship to be so behind?"

"Mr. Kinahan says on account of the foul weather, and the *Royal Anne* being so deep in the water with her cargo aboard. Lud! I wish we may get him back safe and sound. Mr. Kinahan says there have been more ships cast away this year than he ever remembers at this season."

Evidently Mrs. Dingley and Mr. Kinahan had enjoyed a grand shaking of heads over the possible if not probable fate of the *Royal Anne* and her passengers. Mrs. Johnson was too cool-headed a woman to enjoy this sort of excitement under any circumstances.

"You're a fool, Dingley, with your Mr. Kinahan. Pdfr. is all prudence, and will not cross if there's danger. But 'tis mighty provoking we should have put that beef-pudding into the oven."

And she ran to take it out. There ensued a wrangle, for Mrs. Dingley, who had an excellent appetite, was in favour of leaving the pudding where it was. Having been worsted in the fray, she had time to say she had found a letter for Mrs. Johnson at Mr. Kinahan's, from London, but not addressed in Swift's handwriting. Who could it be from? Hetty up to her elbows in dough, and full of her disappointment, bade Dingley take it away. It could be of no consequence, and she would read it some other time.

When the cake was made and put into the oven, and Mrs. Johnson was at the scullery pump washing those strong workaday hands and arms, which seemed out of harmony with her delicately beautiful face, there came a great knocking at the front door. It was the Stoytes and the Walls, with a crowd of little Stoytes and Walls behind them, all come to see Mrs. Johnson's new arrangements at the Dean's lodgings, and to ask when he was expected. Mr. Stoyte was a merchant of the City and Dr. Walls an Archdeacon. They were old Dublin acquaintances of Swift's, and with their wives and his predecessor, Dean Sterne, had been Mrs. Johnson's principal associates in his absence. For in spite of her beauty and other uncommon attractions, her social circle was small. The cause of this was twofold. People belonging to the upper classes grow up at the centre of such a web of acquaintanceships, that wherever they go, at least within the limits of their own country, they are sure to find some scattered threads of it still about them. But Esther was of too humble origin for this to be the case, at least in any way that could advantage her. Swift's sister, Mrs. Fenton, who had some connection with the Temples, either to revenge herself on her brother for the disgust he had evinced at her own marriage with a tradesman, or because she guessed what became of some of his income, had spread exaggerated reports of the menial position occupied by Mrs. Johnson in the Moor Park household. Besides the disadvantage of birth, graver in those days than these, there was undoubtedly an equivocalness about her relations to Swift that all the

hampering precautions with which he surrounded their intercourse could not entirely dissipate. She had followed him to Ireland, really at his own suggestion, but according to the common gossip of acquaintances to force herself upon him in marriage; and for eleven years she had been his constant companion, never staying under his roof, but always lodging in his neighbourhood, whether at Dublin or at Laracor. It was true that their party was invariably three-cornered; Mrs. Dingley was always there. But it was not necessary for the scandal-mongers to believe that. The world's boasted sagacity even yet means chiefly a dull conviction that every one is like every one else, or if they are not, then they ought to be; that the average human being has low standards, and that one who is not average should be regarded with peculiar suspicion. The common standard was lower in most respects under the last of the Stuarts than it is to-day, and there was a proportionately greater difficulty in believing that a higher one could exist. So all things considered, it reflected credit on the discretion and general character of the Dean and Mrs. Johnson that, so long as they were alive, the voice of censure, though not silent, spoke only in whispers.

The empty-sounding house now echoed to loud hearty voices with speech not innocent of brogue. Its walls, papered above the wainscotes, were bare except for the marks of Dean Sterne's pictures. Only a few rooms were furnished, and those scantily, with such furniture as could be immediately spared from the little vicarage at Laracor, and sundry plain second-hand articles. Mrs. Johnson was scrupulously clean and neat in her household ways, and could by incessant harrying make even an Irish servant so while under her supervision, but she had little taste, either natural or acquired, and even to the eye of a formal generation there was a dryness and primness, a want of home-like grace, about her domestic arrangements. However, the visitors, belonging as they did to the more good-natured side of St. George's Channel, found plenty of pleasant things to say

about the big dreary house; reserving such unpleasant things as could not but occur to them, since they had known it under a much more comfortable aspect, for their supper-party at the Archdeacon's.

The sky was dark with clouds and it was almost dusk, when, the inspection completed from garret to cellar, they all stood in the flagged hall, as those stand who "often take leave but seem loth to depart;" and never in Dr. Sterne's most hospitable days had the sounds of merriment been heartier there. Mrs. Johnson, quite recovered from her disappointment, was the most animated of all, and would pay no attention to Dingley's ostentatious gloom and hints of the disappointment which might befall those who reckoned too much on the new Dean's arrival. She put them down to the poor woman's chagrin at being unable to impress her with a due sense of Pdfr.'s perils by sea. Mrs. Johnson was a capital mimic; she had just been reproducing for them Archbishop King, as he appeared coming to ask her if Dean Swift was home yet, and if not, why not. "Then pray, Madam, am I to understand that *you* are in occupation of this Deanery?"—she had just asked herself in a voice of pompous horror, rolling her eyes severely and sucking her lips in a so droll caricature of the Archiepiscopal manner, that a roar of laughter drowned the noise of a modest knock at the front door. The performance was proceeding when the knock came again, this time the least bit louder. Mr. Stoyte opened the great mahogany door a little way, prepared to dismiss some importunate inquirer for the Dean. Then with an exclamation, he threw it wide. A tall figure in a great drugget overcoat and a large clerical hat stood there dripping with rain and black against the outer twilight. It was the friend they were all expecting, one of them eagerly expecting, to see in the course of a few hours; but for a minute they stood awkwardly silent, like riotous boys when the school-master appears. Swift too, crossing the threshold of his future home for the first time, wet and weary from a toilsome journey, paused in surprise and some annoy-

ance at finding himself in the midst of a large party ; some old friends whom he could have spared at that moment, others children and young people grown out of knowledge. But he was the first to recover himself.

"Why, Goody," he said to Mrs. Stoyte who stood nearest to him, "where's your civility ? You stare at me as though I were Banquo's ghost."

"Welcome, Mr. Dean, welcome home," cried the lady thus addressed, taking his proffered hand and offering her cheek for a friendly salute. "Sure, sir, you were something of a ghost in your manner of appearing, which must excuse us, but you're welcome indeed back to old Dublin."

Then followed immediately a great shaking of hands and some decorous kissing, as manners then permitted or enjoined among friends, and a chorus of welcome back to his old friends and the new Deanery and congratulations on his at length taking possession of his own.

The person whom his eyes had first sought when he stood on the threshold was among the last whom he greeted. Mrs. Johnson, by nature calm and long accustomed to prudence in her relations with Swift, had no thought of rushing forward to greet him. After a few minutes, which seemed a long time, he came to her, took her hand and kissed her cheek in a manner studiously the same as that in which he had saluted the other ladies, though his smile brightened perceptibly. The moment had arrived of which she had dreamed every night before falling asleep for three years, and although she did not analyse her feelings she felt strangely blank and cold, and really vexed because she had not had time to change her dress before he saw her. She had dreamed of meeting in so many ways. Sometimes of waiting on the quay and watching the sail of his homeward-bound ship for a long while before he landed. Sometimes of waiting in her own parlour, or latterly at the Deanery, till he should come in and take both her hands and hold them tight in his, and begin at once to say a thousand silly tender things in their own "little

language." In her dreams even the eternal Dingley had somehow been got rid of for the moment. But in the reality, not only Dingley but a little crowd of more irksome spectators were present. The Stoytes and Walls, however, soon considerately left the tired, rain-soaked traveller to Mrs. Johnson's and Mrs. Dingley's kind care, and they and Bridget had enough to do to find dry clothes and prepare the supper.

Swift too was depressed and disappointed. He was conscious that his long absence in London had slackened the ties of tender intimacy that bound him to Hetty Johnson, but he honestly believed that he had but to meet her for all to be as before. Already a few days earlier he had gone forth in spirit to meet her, and had made his heart beat to the old tune, as he read her last letter alone on the walls of Chester. When Ppt. had begun to exchange journals with Pdfr. she had done a foolish thing, for not only was the life she had to record monotonous and already familiar to him, but also, though thanks to him she could write better than many much finer ladies, her epistolary style was disappointing. The excitement of his approaching return had given freshness and feeling to her last letter. The place in which it had been read too had been favourable to it. As he paced the peaceful city walls which men yet living remembered as the scene of grim battle and bloodshed—behind him the grey towers of the Cathedral, silent except for the chiming bells, before him the wide green lowlands through which the river flows broadening to the sea—he realised for the first time that London was already far away, and that to-morrow England too would be left behind. Then with graver purpose he repeated to himself what he had cried out before to the Vanhomrighs, that when once he got to Ireland he meant to forget everything in England. He had sent off a lively letter from Chester to Mrs. Vanhomrigh, playfully directed, "At the sign of the Three Widows, St. James' Street," and studiously addressed to all three ladies. But a shorter, more personal note had found its way to Essie from St. Albans. His indisposition had prevented his leaving

London at the time he had intended, and his interview with Essie in Bury Street had not been the last.

Up to the time when he became aware that Esther loved him, he cannot be reckoned very blameworthy in his conduct to her. He had always been something of a flirt, but a divine of five-and-forty seemed most unlikely to make a dangerous impression on the heart of a girl accustomed to see some of the finest society in London. It was as yet but early in that eighteenth century which afterwards so successfully cultivated the valuable Art of Friendship between men and women. Abroad indeed, where women enjoyed greater consideration, a Descartes and a Leibnitz had already given excellent examples of such friendships, and Swift himself had in early life owed much to his frank and pleasant intimacy with the daughters of Lord Berkeley. But born in an age of idle gallantry and intrigue, he may be pardoned for not having always realised when he was sinning against the unwritten rules of friendship; as he certainly did in his relations with Esther Vanhomrigh, both by the flatteries he constantly mingled with his apparent rough sincerity, and by his general want of openness.

These faults, patent enough in his letters, were exaggerated in the verses he wrote, ostensibly in her honour, but really in his own. They were not only full of flattery and vanity; they were positively untruthful. How untruthful his habit of seeing life through a distorting medium made him probably unaware. But whatever his former or subsequent blindness to the errors of his own conduct, he could not but partially acknowledge them in those two days following Esther's avowal, which he spent alone and confined to his lodgings. Shame, disappointment, grief, he felt most truly for himself and her. Political chagrins became for a time matters of minor importance, and he thought of little else but Esther and her strange, unhappy passion. He did not confess to himself that there had been a moment some two months back, when it had pleased him to make sure that no other man

occupied a higher place in her heart than himself. He did confess that he could, if he would, have suspected his place there to be too high for her happiness. But no. He had refused to be a coxcomb, and his approaching departure had seemed a natural solution of the problem, if it existed. He was fond of saying to her that if ever she became the victim of love, she had only to apply to him for a cure, a certain cure in the case of one like herself possessed of a will and a reason. Now must he keep his promise; but, alas! the surgeon had a trembling hand. He who could so savagely carve his adversaries in public, could not bear to inflict the smallest wound in private, even on an indifferent person, much less on a friend. The good and the evil in him were alike to be fatal to Esther. Vanity was for the moment silenced, but he who disbelieved in romantic passion had become the object of such a passion. He was like a man who, having always scoffed at the supernatural, at length has seen a ghost; behind his amazement and fear of the thing, there is a strange, reluctant, fascinated desire to see it again. The apparition could not have been real; he would like to touch it, to make sure it was a delusion. So on the third day Swift went round to St. James' Street, to convince Esther Vanhomrigh and himself that her passion for him was a delusion.

Mrs. Vanhomrigh and Molly were out. Esther appeared alone, cold, haughty, pale; as different as possible from the flushed eloquent Esther of three days ago. Swift thought to put them both more at ease by chatting of his health and his journey, but she answered him with sombre monosyllables. He went on to tell her that his bad head had put everything out of his mind, and most of all any nonsense she might have talked last Saturday, which indeed he had never taken seriously. But she brushed his pretence of misunderstanding and forgetfulness on one side, and with a strange unnatural calmness told him that if she had forfeited his esteem, she would prefer at whatever cost to part from him finally then and there. Yet if that were so, she could not but

regard him as less perfectly just and reasonable than she had always believed, as in confessing to him the real state of her feelings she had only obeyed his own oft-repeated maxims. She had never pretended to agree with him in his contempt for love; a man to whom life was prodigal of interests might easily spare that, but she, confined in a miserable narrow feminine existence, could not afford to despise the one good thing it offered. Being a woman she must love, and being his pupil she could only love what he had taught her to prefer. Youth, fine clothes, rank, wealth, he had taught her to hold cheap, and to value nothing but wit and worth. Where had she found these more than—so much as—in himself? And then she went on to speak of him as he had seemed to her, not as some women might have done, adorning him with a miscellany of gifts and virtues not his own, but painting a portrait so like, and yet so subtly flattered by the rich colouring of love, that Swift must have been devoid of human vanity had he not looked on it with pleasure. This was what in his happiest moments he himself hoped he was. So from the confused protestations of inalterable esteem and affection with which at first he had interrupted her, he went on to tell her in a hundred different forms, what by some sophistry he persuaded himself was true—that he had never been in love; and to add what was reasonable—that he was too old now to begin. And the magnetism of a character stronger and more decided in some directions than his own, and the old habit of sympathy and tenderness for Essie, and also flattered vanity, drew him on into protestations of a warm pre-eminent friendship for her, not far removed from love. Yet when Mrs. Vanhomrigh had returned, and he had bidden them all good-bye, was it in sober earnest or in irony that he cried out just before he closed the door behind him?—

"You'll forget me, madams, in spite of your fine speeches. No matter, for I propose to forget you every one—statesmen, Churchmen, women, wits, I'll forget every one of you, when once I'm safe across the Channel!"

And now he was across the Channel, but a thousand bitter thoughts bred in England pursued him still, and made his head and heart ache together. How empty and poverty-stricken looked the big house he must now call his home! His lodgings in London had been simple enough, but for three years he had been accustomed to frequent great houses sumptuously appointed; and a certain smaller house, how home-like it had been!

Yes, it was a pity Ppt. had not had time to make her toilette, for she was really not looking her best in her holland working dress and plain cap. So it appeared to him that she had lost some of her beauty in these three years, which was not really the case. But it was not the common spell of beauty that had drawn and bound him to Hetty Johnson, and he would not much have minded its diminution, if he had not been conscious too of a certain mental estrangement between them.

But Ppt. must not know how joyless was his home-coming. Arm in arm, though followed by the inevitable Dingley, they walked from room to room, Mrs. Hetty proudly pointing out her clever devices for saving expense, which she knew Pdfr. did not love, though sure no one was so generous to his friends. At every room they entered the chill of the large empty house, where he must live alone, struck deeper into his soul. But Hetty did not guess that for all her quick wit; he would not for the world have let her guess it. No; she was "dea' char' Ppt.," and "fifty thousand times dear li' dallah," and "diverting witch," and all the sweet familiar names; and as he acted bravely the old part, he hated himself for not being in truth the old Poor-Dear-Fond-Rogue. By the time they had left the small supper-table in the big dining-parlour, Mrs. Hetty had quite got over her first disappointment in her friend's home-coming, and sat knitting and chatting in the great elbow-chair, as happy and pretty as possible. It was the old chair she had always sat in at Laracor, and she had a long story to tell of how she had made that lazy impudent rascal Parvisol, the

bailiff, see that all the geese's down was kept the whole time the Doctor was away, and how in consequence there had been no new feather-beds to buy for the Deanery; and besides she had fresh stuffed the cushions of this chair, and covered it all with her old chintz gown, the one with pink and red flowers on it, that Pdfr. used to like so much, did he remember?

"Faith, do I, P. T. On my conscience 'twas so smart it might have made Miss there pass for a handsome woman—in a small church or at a country fair, might it not, D. D.?"

Here was an opportunity for Dingley, who had been trying all this while to make him see she was offended with him.

"Sure, Mr. Dean," she replied, pinching up her features, "there's many persons in Dublin, not to speak of the country, that still think Mrs. Johnson extreme handsome. I have heard our late excellent Dean protest in this very room, that there was ladies made toasts of in London that could not hold a candle to her, and Dr. Tisdale, who knows the world, frequently protested that Mrs. Johnson was the most elegant woman of his acquaintance."

"Tisdale know the world!" exclaimed Swift snappishly. "Ay, Tisdale's world. I'd rather know my own back-yard."

"Pray now, you silly D. D.," cried Hetty, laughing and blushing with pleasure at being complimented so before Pdfr., "when was it you was seen kissing the Blarney stone? As to you, sir, you shall henceforth spare the poor Tisdale creature, who has not very long to live; I hear he has fallen into a yaller-green sickness since he heard the news of your Deanship's promotion."

"What, doth he envy me?" asked Swift. "Tell me that again, little P. T. There's one that envies me! This is mighty diverting, and the Lord knows I want diverting."

"To be sure he does, Dear Rogue, and there's plenty of others that thought no great things of the Vicar of Laracor, fit to burst with envy at seeing the

grand place he s got. The Archbishop too must be mightily disappointed, for he was so positive the Queen would never give you aught worth your taking."

"Who was it learned you to knit, Pretty Pet?" asked Swift, making no reply to her observation.

"Mrs. Walls," returned Hetty; "and now I can knit stockings without looking at 'em and talking all the while, as you may see."

"Confound Goody Walls!" he cried. "In London, you know, my dear, the ladies would think it uncivil to be knitting stockings when their gallants was courting 'em. Your click-clacking needles drive me distracted—or would, did they not remind the Poor Fond Rogue that his dearest, sweetest friend, who has never been absent from his mind, never, so help him, all this while, sits beside him again in the flesh—and may she never let him go away from her again, to fall into Lord knows what follies and miseries!"

"Indeed, Dearest Rogue, if you was to settle in England, Dingley and I would not remain behind. Yet though I cannot help fancying you do not love to come back to poor Ireland, I believe in the end you will be best satisfied to stay there. Yes, Pdfr. will end by loving Ireland better than England, like Ppt. 'Tis a freer place for man—which is you, and beast—which is me."

So the evening passed in affectionate trifling talk, in which if Hetty Johnson and her friend were often at cross-purposes, he alone was aware of it. And this was not owing to any dulness of perception on her part, but to his own self-control and careful tenderness. He would sooner have died than have returned after three long years only to wound a kind and faithful heart.

It was past ten o'clock when Patrick lighted the lantern to escort the ladies back to those new lodgings on Ormond's Quay, which certainly Pdfr. must visit to-morrow. Mrs. Johnson, still full of exhilaration, must needs go on laughing at and talking to Patrick, as he headed the procession of three

which came out of the garden door of the Deanery. It had left off raining now, and up beyond the dark Cathedral tower, the thin clouds showed a pale blur of light where the moon was trying to appear. From the moment the Deanery door closed behind them, Mrs. Dingley, who walked last, had been endeavouring to attract her friend's attention. As they reached the narrow entrance of St. Patrick Street, the moon burst out, lighting up on one side a long row of huddled gables nodding to their fall, and on the other showing the points and pinnacles of similar antique houses, mingled with the straight lines of some brand-new ones, in black relief against the sky.

"Now, my good Patrick," said Mrs. Dingley, "'tis plainly light enough for us to see the puddles on this side of the street, and as I have somewhat to say to Mrs. Johnson, I beg you will walk on the other."

"Lord, Dingley," laughed Mrs. Johnson, "what can you have to say to me? Nothing so pleasant, I'll be bound, as Patrick here, who has been playing a very great part in the world since we saw him last. He tells me his master was looked on as the greatest wit in London above stairs, but below stairs where Pat was, it seems they knew of a better. Come now, Patrick, continue the story of your laced hat, which I can tell you I am in a prodigious hurry to see."

Mrs. Dingley, however, was in earnest, and Patrick diplomatically retired. She had now got a letter out of the big pocket that hung beneath her skirt. It had been burning a hole there for hours.

"Hetty child," she said solemnly, "I believe you have forgotten this letter. 'Tis from your mother, and alas! she has very ill news for you."

"I am concerned to hear it," replied Hetty. "The Dean had heard nothing on't before he left."

"The Dean had heard nothing on't!" snorted Mrs. Dingley, her wrath beginning to overflow; "no, no, why should any one tell him, since he would be the first to know the truth on't? Now prepare yourself, my poor child, for something very surprising."

"Plague take you, D. D.," returned Hetty, not able to think of anything that would incurably distress her

on this happiest of evenings. "Be plain. You have always fifty words to one meaning."

"O 'tis indeed a cruel, false, perfidious conduct! I never could have believed it of him."

Hetty snatched the open letter from Dingley's hand with an impatient exclamation.

"Indeed, Hetty, you need be in no such haste. But if you must know what your mother says, 'tis this. She hath it from a sure hand that the new Dean of St. Patrick is shortly to be married, the lady young and a tortin."

Mrs. Johnson laughed a loud, somewhat startled, but incredulous laugh.

"Good God, Dingley!" she cried, "what silly stuff is this you talk? I thought my mother had more sense than to write me these paltry inventions the Temples ever love to spread about Doctor Swift."

"You're wrong there, Esther. 'Tis no invention at all, but your mother had it from Mr. Erasmus Lewis, who met her walking in the Park, and very right she did to tell you of it."

"Pooh! Mr. Lewis must be in his dotage. And let me tell you, D. D., you take a great liberty in opening my letters. If you was let read Pdfr.'s, why, there were reasons for that. But now, madam, you will please leave the rest alone."

"Highty-tighty, miss!" cried Dingley, and was silent a minute or so in indignation; then she resumed, "I always knew no good would come of these strange ways of his and yours. I was sure you had better have taken Tisdale, if Dr. Swift would not come forward honestly, and be married like any other woman. What right had he to get between a pretty young miss and her lover, and yet never to talk of marrying her himself? I have bade Mrs. Walls and Mrs. Stoyte take notice fifty times that I have said there was something odd and slippery about him, and harm would come of it, and now see how it's all fallen out, just as I foretold. O, the false villain!"

"Dingley," said Hetty with cold severity, "I will not hear you speak so unseemly of our great, our generous benefactor. If you cannot constrain your-

self to be silent before me alone, I will call Patrick. You will scarce, I believe, vilify him before his own footman."

But Dingley, whose terror of Swift had alone enabled her to keep silence for so long, was now not to be controlled. So Mrs. Johnson, thrusting the unlucky letter deep into her pocket to read by herself, left her and crossed the road and walked home with Patrick. When she was retiring to rest she again addressed Mrs. Dingley, but only to say in a voice full of haughty firmness, that on no pretext whatever was she to hear any more of this nonsense about the Dean ; who would be horribly angry with D. D., if it should come to his ears.

But the grey dawn, that surprises the June night before it has well hushed the world, found a candle still burning in a certain upper room on Ormond's Quay, and a woman, very pale between the blackness of her loosened hair and the whiteness of her pillow, writing, writing in bed. The two letters she wrote were both short, and one, that to her mother, simple ; the other, to Mr. Erasmus Lewis, was diplomatic and took a great deal of thought. The ingenuous Mr. Ford had talked to her about these Vanhomrighs the last time that he was in Dublin, and in consequence she had asked about them next time she wrote to Pdfr. ; but though it was plain her friend was constantly at their house, he had said nothing in reply, except that they moved in the best society. Now, under pretence of rebuking Mr. Lewis for putting materials for gossip about the Dean into the hands of any one, especially one like her mother, connected with the Temple family, she managed very cleverly to draw him on the subject of the Vanhomrighs. She had finished before it was broad daylight, but she could not sleep. She lay staring wide-awake, reflecting how frightfully she would look to-morrow after her unwonted vigil, and how foolish it was to think twice of this nonsense about her poor dearest fondest Rogue. Yet still she thought not twice, but many times about it.

And the same dawn, creeping in at the tall windows

of the Deanery, found the large bed so carefully stuffed for the Dean with the feathers of those Laracor geese, empty and undisturbed. But as the grey light filtered through the thin curtains of the dining-parlour, and a dying candle flared up for a moment as though to meet it, there was visible the form of a man seated in the large chintz-covered elbow-chair. His face was hidden, for he sat huddled up and bowed across the arm of the chair; and whether he slept, or merely lay quiescent in a dull stupor of misery, following on some more active suffering or despair, no one could have said. But the next morning, when the neighbours hastened to pay their respects to the new Dean, the Dean was sick and would see no one, absolutely no one

---

CHAPTER XI.

All the high red-cushioned pews in St. Patrick's were well occupied on the day when Dr. Swift was to be installed. It was principally harmless curiosity and love of assisting at whatever was going forward in the town that drew together this crowd of respectable people; but the curiosity of all could not be considered harmless. For Swift, whom Dublin was hereafter to deify, was at this time unpopular. The fact was accounted for partly by his secession from the Whig party which predominated there, partly by his marked individuality. It is said that some very humble and remote connections of ours all wag their tails the same way, and that if one appears who wags it in another direction, he is immediately torn to pieces by his fellows. Certainly Swift, figuratively speaking, wagged his tail in quite the opposite way to most of his fellows. Besides, as plain Vicar of Laracor he had wrung from the Government by his personal influence a concession for the Irish Church which several of the bishops had failed to obtain. This naturally made him an object of suspicion to

his superiors, nor did the lower clergy love him better.

Not only was the Cathedral full, but a group of idlers had assembled in the porch. Those who sat at the lower end of the church became aware that there was something of unusual interest passing out there. Every one seemed pressing round the large board on which parish notices usually figured; there was a muttering, as of something being deciphered more or less slowly by various readers, and a hum of subdued talk and laughter. The crowd increased, and several gentlemen from within went to add themselves to it. A large sheet of manuscript had been pinned up to the board; it was verse, and written in a somewhat crabbed hand, so that it could not easily be read. But a man jumping up on a bench just below began to read fluently, in a voice more loud than decorous:

"To-day this temple gets a Dean,
Of parts and fame uncommon;
Used both to pray and to profane,
To serve both God and Mammon.

"This place he got by wit and rhyme
And many ways most odd;
And might a bishop be in time,
Did he believe in God.

"For High-Churchmen and policy,
He swears, he prays most hearty;
But would pray back again to be
A Dean of any party."

At about this point there was a flutter among the people at his back, who became aware that the new Dean, preceded by his vergers, had arrived unobserved, and was waiting for a passage to be made through them. The crowd shrunk back on each side as quickly as their number and the narrow space permitted, but the reader continued with some yet more scurrilous lines, though several pulled the skirts of his coat. Then one of the vergers touched him with his mace, enjoining silence.

"Nay, nay, we'll hear the last verse," he cried impudently, and turning round repeated full in Swift's face :

"Look down, St. Patrick, look we pray
On thine own church and steeple ;
Convert thy Dean on this great day,
Or else God help the people !"

But as he ended his voice faltered, for Swift's eye caught his.

"Reach down yonder paper," said the new Dean, in a subdued but imperious tone, pointing to the notice-board. The man slowly removed the intrusive document.

"Tear it up," said the Dean. It was done.

"Smaller," he commanded. The man quailed and obeyed. When it was strewn on the ground in fragments :

"Go !" thundered the Dean. He passed on, while the reader of the lampoon, jumping hastily down, took to his heels and fled away down St. Patrick Street faster than the hunted hare.

The Dean afterwards wrote to Esther Vanhomrigh : "I thought I should have died of discontent, and was horribly melancholy while they were installing me." But this profound disgust and depression were not visible on his calm and dignified countenance as he walked up the aisle ; though Mrs. Johnson, who saw him now for the first time since the evening of his arrival, was distressed to observe that it bore only too strong witness to the genuineness of the illness which had confined him to his room for some days. To her the position he was to fill was far from appearing so contemptible as it did to his London friends, and it was with a thrill of pride that she watched his stately figure pass up the aisle, and finally take possession of the official stall. Swift too, looking down on the confused crowd of faces, which he believed more definitely hostile than for the most part they were, was glad to catch sight of a certain familiar pair of velvet-brown eyes, shining there as kind and true as ever.

No sooner was the Dean installed than he began

to feel again the enmity of Archbishop King, who had already threatened to have him deprived for his delay in taking possession of his office. His predecessor, who had been his friend, but was like most people, easily affected by the popular likes and dislikes, took no trouble to smooth his way with his subordinates; nor did he assist Swift with the pecuniary burden of the new house, that he did not want, and the large debt upon it which he must pay out of a scanty income. His Chapter made no secret of their intention to put themselves in opposition to him. Such a state of things has been successfully faced by many men, and was so later by Swift himself, but in that summer of 1713 he had no heart for it, and literally fled. Early in July he wrote to Essie from Laracor: "I staid but a fortnight in Dublin, very sick, and returned not one visit of a hundred that were made me; but all to the Dean and none to the Doctor. I am riding here for life, and I think I am somewhat better. I hate the thoughts of Dublin, and prefer a field-bed and an earthen floor before the great house there, which they say is mine." Yes, he was very sick—sick not merely of disappointed ambition and friendship, but sick of the frustration of nobler, wider hopes. He had ideals of patriotism and incorruptibility, which though commonplace enough to a later generation, seemed Utopian to his contemporaries. When he joined the Tory party, he, the keen dissecter of human nature, was deceived by his own hopes and the mouthings of a Bolingbroke, into mistaking that intriguing mountebank and his colleagues for statesmen and patriots. The awakening had been bitter; yet he had remained personally loyal to them. Even his disappointment at the unwillingness or inability of his friends to promote him in the Church was justifiable. He had slaved for them as a journalist and as an unrecognized member of the Government, and as he had declined money-gifts and all that savoured of corruption and dependence, he had received nothing for his services. His character was high, his piety was sincere, and if it was somewhat cold, why, the Christianity of the day was

everywhere aspiring to transform itself from a religion into a philosophy: so that there was no reasonable objection to giving him the sort of promotion he desired. Yet he had got nothing but exile. All these things had been a severe strain upon his health, and first at Dublin and afterwards at Laracor he suffered from repeated attacks of his usual illness—"a bad head." At such times he would see no one, not even Ppt. But in spite of the gloom that overshadowed him, the whole cause of which was known only to himself, he made touching efforts to be cheerful in her company, and to treat her with the old tenderness. Nor did he ever rebuke her now, in the tremendous way she had been accustomed to from her childhood. She flitted between Trim and Dublin, where she superintended the practical details of his affairs. Hetty Johnson had a quick intelligence, but the very malleability of her mind, which had enabled it to take the stamp of Swift's, had made her also susceptible to the influences of the last few years, which had been spent with companions of a very different calibre. She had never followed the course of politics, having been brought up by Swift in his less political days, and having perhaps taken too seriously his theoretical dislike to political ladies. So the harassed politician, devouring his London budgets, could not turn to her for the intelligent sympathy and discussion to which another had accustomed him. But this division, which time had made, time could have remedied and that quickly, had it not been for a deeper cause of estrangement between them. Hetty had too much penetration to be wholly deceived by his studied tenderness. If she was all to him that she had once been, he could not be so inconsolable on returning to her society, under whatever circumstances. Was ambition her only rival? Swift was, as she well knew, more than cautious, he was secretive about his correspondence, but once on riding over unusually early from Trim to Laracor, she had found his library empty and a letter slipped from his writing-desk onto the floor. It was a long letter in a bold hand that she had not

supposed a woman's, but as she replaced it on the desk, she could not help seeing the large clear signature: *Esther Vanhomrigh, Junr.* For a moment she felt a temptation to read it—but no; if she could not have his heart she could at any rate be worthy of it. She blushed to find herself on the verge of really acting that part of the jealous woman that Swift had years ago most unjustly accused her of acting. After this she made a timid and vain attempt to extract some statement about the Vanhomrighs from him. Mr. Erasmus Lewits delayed awhile to answer her letter. The lawyer and the friend of Swift strove in his bosom with the loyal and chivalrous admirer of Mrs. Johnson. At length he wrote in a somewhat vague and unsatisfactory style, admitting that he had informed her mother of a certain report about the Dean of St. Patrick's, the truth of which he was far from vouching for, and that he personally knew the good Dean to be on terms of great intimacy with the lady mentioned, but—then followed a great many buts. Finally, he adjured Mrs. Johnson on her honour not to mention the matter to her friend. It was to be hoped that next year, when his circumstances were easier, the enviable Dean would lead a certain fair lady of Dublin to the altar, and then these foolish little scandals would be forgotten. Strange to say, Hetty felt no inclination to mention it to the Dean. She was excessively reserved and not at all impulsive, and her affection for Swift did not preclude a certain awe of him. It would have been an effort to her alike to express her feelings and to face his anger. She had long ago given him her word to leave him absolutely unannoyed by claims of hers to marriage, or to any control over his actions and associates; and her word, as he had often pleased her by observing, was inviolable. Yet for all that she did not meekly accept his conduct towards her. At best he had been guilty of deception, for while professing to take her frankly behind the scenes of his London life, he had kept secret from her an important passage in it. She read over several of his journals, and replaced them in her desk with a bitter smile. She

who was over-quick to criticise others had never before criticised her Great Man, whom she was used to honour before the world had recognised him as such. So while she said nothing, the iron was entering into her soul, and she became less and less responsive to Swift's playful or melancholy tenderness. In the state of dull melancholia into which he had fallen, it was an effort to him to show a personal interest in any human creature, and he felt naturally aggrieved when his efforts did not seem appreciated. It never occurred to him to suppose that Hetty knew or suspected his intimacy with Esther Vanhomrigh. He would have said that to be angry and say nothing, especially on such a subject, was not within the power of a female. He did not doubt her love, but he blamed the coldness of her disposition. And sometimes alone in the evening, when his melancholy deepened with the shadows, when he roamed among his willows in a weary emptiness of thought, while the moon's silver sickle or ruddy sphere floated up through the purple of the summer twilight,—sometimes he seemed to hear the passionate music of a rich young voice, crying again and again, "I worship, I adore, I love you," and to feel as it were the warmth of a kiss flitting over his hand. Who else had ever loved him like that?

All this time his political friends in England were clamouring for his return. They might be a little weary of his predominance when he was there, but now he was gone they were scattered before their enemies as sheep having no shepherd. The internal quarrels of the Ministry had passed all bounds. One morning early in October, at least half-a-dozen letters arrived by the same post, adjuring him by every tie of patriotism, honour, friendship, to take ship immediately for England. Most important among them was a letter from Bolingbroke, in which he distinctly promised to break the Ministry, unless Swift returned at once to chain up the Dragon, as they called Lord Oxford.

By five o'clock that evening he was on board the old *Royal Anne*, and alive again after months of

suspended animation. "The Archbishop will burst with rage when he hears on't," he thought and smiled grimly. Only a few more days, and he would be in the thick of the fight again, more powerful, more feared, more sought after than ever, the champion of his friends, the terror of his foes. What a change from standing on the moral pillory of Dublin, where any one was free to throw a rotten egg at him, because his position forbade retaliation! The last time he had sailed from that shore he had felt as though his heart-strings were fastened to it, to one spot on it, where a beautiful woman stood smiling bravely and waving a handkerchief; and as the ship dropped out with the tide, they had seemed to strain almost to breaking-point. Now when he had leisure to think of her it would be with a mingled pang of remorse and injured affection; but for the moment he could only watch with feelings of unmixed joy the twinkling lights and mountain shores of Ireland fading against the fading sunset, and delight to feel the first bound of the ship, that announced she had slipped into the Channel out of the quiet waters of the Bay.

CHAPTER XII.

"*Juste ciel,* madam; you'd not have me miss a chance. 'Tis so important and secret a matter I dare not entrust it to females, but if some that shall be nameless enjoy their own again, some of us may be the better for't, if we have wit to know in time which side our bread's buttered. And you'd keep me in England on so poor a pretext as that I must dance at a ball! Enfeeble me, madam! I am surprised at your *bêtise!*"

"Pray now, my dear son, be not unkind to your poor mamma," pleaded Mrs. Vanhomrigh. "If 'twere only a ball like another 'twould be of no consequence, but I would not for the world that Molly should miss it."

Mrs. Vanhomrigh, who looked very worn and ill,

was drinking her chocolate in bed. It was not early, but it was early for Ginckel to have made his appearance, especially as instead of the brocaded night-gown and cap that commonly formed his attire on first rising, he wore a riding-dress. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mon Dieu!* mamma, why should she? You must go yourself. 'Twould be very *peu convenable* for my sisters, to be seen in public places without you."

"There's some sense in that, Ginckel," observed Essie, coming in from her mother's dressing-room. "But I beg you will not persuade our mamma to go, for I believe I have just persuaded her to the contrary. I shall think it no loss if we all stay at home."

"I'll wager you won't, miss," replied Ginckel, studying the back of his coat by the aid of his mother's hand-mirror. "You'd be damnably vexed to see your sister get a fine husband, while you can't catch so much as a parson. But I'll allow you the excuse that our mamma hath very little wit in the matter of marrying her daughters. *You* are past praying for, but I have hopes of Moll, who hath a little more confidence in a brother that knows the world and is willing to serve her, if you women do not hinder him too much with your vapours and your strivings."

"I will go, my dear son, indeed I will!" cried Madam Van, and added nervously—"But remember, 'tis Moll's twenty-first birthday in six weeks, and you must be back here to see to her business."

"Mr. Lewis and Mr. Barber protest I am an excellent lawyer, mamma," said Essie, "so if Ginckel will give me the power, I can manage that matter for him. I hope, however, when he gets to France he will continue to keep out of prison, for he put you in a sad fright last time. And as to money, Ginckel, I tell you plainly you shall not have so much as a brass token if I can hinder you. You would have brought our poor mamma to a sponging-house long ago, if she had only her own fortune to depend on."

Ginckel had changed colour for some reason while Mrs. Vanhomrigh was speaking, but made some appropriate repartee to Essie, and then recovering himself entered into a lengthy discourse on his adventures in Paris last year, from which it appeared that the tradesman at whose suit he had been imprisoned would not have ventured on such an audacious course, had he not been instigated to it by a certain person of very great quality, who had the *mauvais goût* to be jealous of his lady. But as the Colonel had now made up his mind to pay his addresses seriously to a young and wealthy widow, his Highness need no longer be under any apprehension. So kissing his fingers to his mother and sister, and promising that should they fail in securing a good match for Molly in London, he would marry her in France when his own affairs were concluded, he set out for Dover.

But though Madam Van's dress came home punctually—a dove-coloured and red silk, the petticoat branched with large trees, very fine—and she could not deny herself the pleasure of trying it on, she did not go to the ball. She was so ill that she was obliged to notice the fact, though hitherto her enjoying temperament and power of overlooking all the disagreeables of life, had enabled her to conceal from herself and others the rapid progress of what was in fact a mortal malady, though she did not know it. For she and her daughters were agreed in a well-founded distrust of doctors, and called none in to administer their miscellaneous rubbish that did duty as medicine, and to ply the fatal lancet, that was answerable for more deaths in that generation than the sword of the *Grand Monarque.* Now it happened that young Mrs. Harris was also invited to the great ball, to which Ginckel had got his mother and sisters invitations. This was an unprecedented event for her, and arose from the fact that Mr. Peter Ponsonby's step-mother, who gave it, was a City heiress connected with the Harris family. Molly then could go with her; an arrangement that Esther objected to in vain and just to satisfy her conscience, as she

objected to everything that threw her sister with the Mordaunt set. But she had nothing definite to allege against them except her own dislike, as Molly could truthfully say when they discussed the matter; which was as seldom as possible, because it hurt them both too much when they fell into a dispute. The Mordaunt set consisted chiefly of youths of fashion, who had begun their career as such at sixteen; which they could easily do, because it was a career in which not one manly thought or feeling or even accomplishment, except fencing, was required of them. Such gregarious creatures, each incapable of occupying or amusing himself, readily collected round any woman who, like Molly, had been elevated to the rank of a toast. And in this case besides the gratification it afforded their juvenile vanity to be seen with ladies of fashion, as the Vanhomrighs had somehow come to be considered, Madam Van and Molly's lively talk was of a kind that attracted and amused all sorts and conditions of men. But discernment is not the gift of youth, and very young people, whether they inhabit the poet's Dreamland or the worldliest of worlds, are equally subject to illusions. The illusions differ in their nature according to temperament and surroundings, and the beautiful ones have happily as a rule more relation to the important truths of life than the ugly and cynical ones. The particular illusion of the Mordaunt set consisted in a belief that society divided itself into persons like themselves and grave, severe folks with claims to be considered more virtuous, which claims need not, however, be always admitted, because no one could frequent the theatre of the day without learning that virtue is usually but a hypocritical affectation. The grave, religious man of the comedy was sure to turn out a greater villain than the dissipated hero, only not so successful. So these young gentlemen, while they paid Miss Vanhomrigh, who treated them with frank contempt, the tribute of a respectful dislike, were not so respectful in their liking for her mother and younger sister. That women should be gay, pleasure-loving,

fond of fine clothes and fine names, foolishly frolicsome and tolerant, all that and more, and yet as pure and kind and in their way as simple as sisters of charity; that between such women as the two Vanhomrighs and themselves, in spite of some superficial likeness, there was a great gulf fixed of feeling and belief and all fundamental things,—this the Mordaunt set could not be expected to understand, any more than Molly and Mrs. Vanhomrigh could understand the situation from their point of view. Madam Van had preserved through all her experiences, and they had not been few, the mind as well as the heart of a child. Even Esther, although she vaguely distrusted her brother's companions, could never have believed that the young men who about six o'clock adjourned noisily from her mother's too hospitable table to White's or the Fountain tavern, there out of mere exhilaration, were wont to cast very serious imputations on the character of their hostess and her younger daughter. But it is certain that while Mrs. Vanhomrigh was whispering to her friends that Lord Mordaunt would marry her Molly to-morrow were it not for his fear of the Earl of Peterborough, which would probably not restrain him long now he had come to his majority; while she was both saying and believing this, a less flattering piece of gossip about the fair Vanhomrigh had somehow found its way into society.

Meantime Esther had only too many opportunities for comparing her Dean favourably with the rest of mankind, as represented by the youth of fashion. She had never been like another Esther, blind to all his faults, but she justly conceived that even in these his nature showed itself composed of superior elements to theirs. Intellectually he of course played the part of Gulliver among the Lilliputians, only he was more outspokenly satirical than his hero. The idea of *Gulliver's Travels* had long been present with him, and at Laracor he had begun to write the work. When he had returned to London in October, political exigencies had interrupted it, and he used to say that only himself and Esther and Pope and Gay

would ever make the acquaintance of the much-travelled Captain and his friends. To Swift and Esther the personages and circumstances of *Gulliver* became so familiar a part of their lives, that they seemed to have almost a joint property in it. From which it may be inferred that any resolutions the Dean may have formed in Ireland on the subject of Miss Essie had been reconsidered in London; a result for which his belief in his own theories of life were as much to blame as some natural and amiable weaknesses of character. Did he throw her off entirely, he had grounds for thinking it possible she might fall a victim to the snares of certain hungry fortune-hunters, who had become very assiduous since Cousin Purvis had declared her intentions. For Esther had been spending the summer and part of the autumn, at Twittenham with Cousin Purvis, who was so pleased with her good nursing and kind ways, that she had at last made a will, and had therein constituted Esther Vanhomrigh, Junior, her principal legatee. And of this the old lady had made no secret, for she thought if it were known her favourite might make the better match for it.

On first returning to London Swift had taken a lodging at a distance from St. James' Street, but it was uncomfortable and the old one was empty, so he went back there. At this time Esther was still away at Twittenham, and he wrote with a certain sense of virtue, to tell Ppt. that he was dining every three days with neighbour Van, whose eldest daughter was away from home. He did not add that he missed the said eldest daughter very much, especially as the first flush of triumph at returning to political life had passed off, and before long he had found himself in the situation of some powerful spirit men conjure up to mock by the imposition of impossible tasks. Weaving ropes of sand would have been a profitable industry compared to the attempt to weld together a party disintegrated by petty feuds and ambitions, as well as by inevitable circumstances; for the Queen could not live much longer, and after her death there would be no place

for a Tory party as it then existed. The Tories must either resign themselves to the absolute triumph of the Whigs on the accession of George of Hanover, or they must turn Jacobites. There was no longer any room for a convenient if illogical, compromise between rival theories of Monarchy. In after years some people liked to say that Swift had never been in the confidence of the Ministry which he professed to manage; and it was true that Bolingbroke and others had at this time relations with the Stuarts at St. Germains which they dared not disclose to him. He had no knowledge of their vacillating intrigues, but he saw well enough that something was being concealed from him.

Esther allowed herself to be detained by Mrs. Purvis, because in spite of her restless longing to go back to London, she was also afraid to go; not so much reasonably afraid of her own feelings as unreasonably afraid of their object. All those quiet summer days and nights at Twittenham she had been feeding her passion with dreams, and she had still sense enough to know that the reality would not resemble them. She feared that she could not meet her divinity without in some way manifesting her adoration, nor support without sickening anguish some awful look or bitter jest of his. But one golden day in the very end of October the dreams and the fears alike came to an end at the touch of reality. It was literally a golden day, for there had been no wind to strip the trees of their leaves, and the single trees of garden and hedgerow and the sloping woods over the Thames, were all burning from summit to base in different shades of gold. The big chestnut in Mrs. Purvis' garden that stretched its arms into the river, threw golden reflections deep down into the water, and yet had prodigally carpeted the paths with gold. The Michaelmas daisies and even the dahlias and bushy fuchsias were still bright in the borders, and the noonday sunshine made the sheltered garden almost hot, as Essie walked there with her mother and Molly and the Dean of St. Patrick's. Soon after she returned to London.

Volumes of analysis would scarcely suffice to set forth what is yet one of the world's commonest commonplaces; namely the process by which upright and intelligent people can by imperceptible degrees slide into positions which any one but themselves can see to be morally, and it may be practically, untenable. If the relations between Esther and Swift were extraordinary, there was nothing extraordinary in the process by which they arrived at them. The intimacy to which they were accustomed, the right to her absolute confidence that Swift as Mentor had early assumed to himself, soon made it appear natural to both that he should know her secret, although it related to himself. Her passionate, adoring love seemed to be crystallised, to have gained a greater strength and definiteness, from having been permitted expression, and though at this time never again directly expressed, it coloured their whole intercourse,—it not merely filled, but was, her life. It must have been a strange and thrilling thing for a sensitive, imaginative man and one arrived at an age when he might be supposed to be beyond the reach of new emotional experiences, to be suddenly as it were enveloped in the warm atmosphere of a love, the like of which he had never received or experienced, and that at a time when all the world about him seemed especially cold and unsatisfactory. He himself had sighed for Miss Waring in youthful folly, and had known the tender and the jealous agitation of a lover in his long attachment to Hetty Johnson. Hetty on her side had always loved him with a calm and deep affection in accordance with her own character and the education he had given her; but neither of the pair had been capable of such passion, such complete devotion as Esther Vanhomrigh's. Swift was at bottom very faithful in his friendships even to women, but he was superficially capricious and easily chilled and offended by any one. Ppt., it must be confessed, had been cold, even sarcastic to him of late; a fact which did not help him to resist the magnetism of this wonderful, incomprehensible passion, that sometimes drew him into its warm folds,

sometimes vexed and repelled him, but was never long absent from his thoughts. There was a fascination too, a sense of power in ruling so strong a nature, that itself delighted to rule. Hetty's submission to him, a thing much older than her womanhood, was too complete and too much a matter of course to affect him in the same way. Then there was the sympathy and quick understanding he found with Essie during the last desperate struggles of the Tory party in the year 1713–14; and the flattery to his vanity—that vanity which his pride could conceal but not destroy, when he heard Esther and her fortune flattered. All these things helped him to drop easily into a position which was like, but not the same as the old friendly intimacy. He continued to say before her how he laughed at men who fell in love and pitied men who married, and further relieved his conscience by reflecting that time and circumstances must inevitably destroy Essie's absurd passion for himself. Meantime why make two innocent people superfluously unhappy and uncomfortable?

Thus had matters progressed—for such matters can only apparently stand still—through the autumn and winter. Now it was May, and after a stormy interview with the two leaders of the Ministry, Lord Oxford and Lord Bolingbroke, who every day hated each other worse, he called at the Vanhomrighs' on his way home. The excitement of the fray was still in his blood, and he would have liked to act the interview all over again to Essie, and get her either to confirm his wavering intention to shake the dust of London off his feet, or to lend him good reasons for staying. To his disappointment, he found she had been called away to Twittenham by the sudden illness of Mrs. Purvis. After a few preoccupied words with Madam Van and Molly, he went slowly home and sat down to read. He held a book in his hand—his favourite *History of the Civil Wars*—but he did not read more than a paragraph, and in his rambling thoughts it was not Oxford and Bolingbroke that most persistently held a place. He was not long

left to his meditations, for presently Mr. Erasmus Lewis climbed his two pair of stairs, full of concern at the hopeless position of political affairs. Mr. Lewis was the safest of confidants, and Swift found some relief in telling him all that had passed between the two Ministers and himself, though on their side it had been nothing but violent recriminations, while he, after vain attempts at reconciliation and a few angry sarcasms, had, as he said, bitten up paper and tugged at his wig for the rest of the two full hours.

"And pray, Dean, is this true that's about the town, that you'll be married before you go home to Dublin?" asked Mr. Lewis, with an indifference that was only assumed; for at the bottom of his legal soul there blossomed some strange, incongruous little flowers of chivalry and kind feeling.

The Dean started.

"A plague upon their nasty tattle!" he cried. "Who told you so, Lewis?"

"Oh, half-a-dozen persons."

"Half-a-dozen liars!" and Swift began to bite a letter he held in his hand.

"Then 'tis false, Dean?"

"False as hell or the *Review*."

"I'm glad on't," replied Mr. Lewis, shortly. "But if I had heard you was to be married in Dublin—faith, now, I should wish 'twas true."

"Married!" sniffed the Dean. "Lord love thee, man! Art gotten an old woman, with thy head full of weddings and funerals? You'll see me buried, I warrant, but married—h'm."

"Have you had good news of Mrs. Johnson lately?" asked Mr. Lewis. "She was but sadly three weeks since."

Swift changed colour.

"Who told you so?" he asked.

"Her sister; I met her at Lady Giffard's Tuesday se'nnight."

"I knew nothing on't," returned Swift. "Pray Heaven she may be better! Poor, poor—Mrs. Johnson!"

Mr. Lewis having said his say took leave. But

his visit had thrown a gleam of daylight from without on Swift's position. Such a gleam would be lost on some, but on him it was not. His mind, half conventional, half casuistic, might deny it, but his heart owned the paramount claim of Ppt. upon his life. Now for these many months her image had been little, ever less and less with him. She had been suffering, and he had not even known it! In deep remorse he penned her a letter full of tenderness and commiseration. He thanked Heaven there was no chance of her hearing this report about his marriage; but it made an added reason for his retirement from London, and, in spite of the remonstrances of his political and private friends, he left it suddenly towards the end of May. He betook himself to a country village—a little solitary place, hidden in a wooded fold of the Berkshire downs. Before leaving town he sent one of his brief notes, so guarded they make the reader ask his reason for such caution, to Esther at Twittenham; but she had left before it arrived, Cousin Purvis being out of danger from her stroke, though still hardly in her senses, and Mrs. Vanhomrigh unwell.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Molly was waiting for her chair to go to the ball, she remarked that Essie looked pale, which was only natural, seeing she had already had a week of severe sick-nursing at Twittenham. Essie, like many people before and since the generation that regarded weakliness as a charm, was somewhat conceited on the score of her good health. She flatly denied being pale, and taking out her own Turkish shawl, that her godfather had brought her from Adrianople, she wrapped it about her sister's white rounded throat and bosom, cautiously, so as not to crumple the laces and ribbons.

"Take care of your own health, miss," she said, "and leave mine to take care of itself. It can do very

well, I dare assure you." And while she stood there wrapping Molly up, it struck her that she had never seen her sister look so pretty as to-night. It gave her pleasure to see that, but also it filled her with a vague, unreasonable anxiety.

"Pray now be good, Moll," she said, "and not a madcap, and be not too hugely diverted, nor come back with a great cold, but be good."

"I will answer thee, Hess, 'sad face and true maid,'" replied Molly, with her little smile that had in it a touch of satiric humour. "Know then, Governor Huff, I shall divert myself to the top of my bent this day, next day, and some two thousand days after, and be as mad as a colt in clover, and all this out of pure kindness to a certain sober-sided Mrs. Moll you shall one day make acquaintance with, that she may know the world's a snare and live discreetly."

The chairman's knock resounded through the house, and tapping her elder sister delicately on the nose with her fan, Miss Molly tripped downstairs.

Esther was already undressed, and when she had settled her mother for the night, she threw herself into her bed with a sigh of contentment and fell fast asleep. She slept sound, for she was young and healthy, and it was many nights since she had had her natural rest. She must have slept for several hours when she became aware of some one talking in the adjoining room, the partition-wall of which was thin. She lay still for a little between sleeping and waking, hearing the voice but attaching no ideas to it, till suddenly she realised that this querulous moaning voice was her mother's, and that it came from Ginckel's room which should have been empty. In a moment she was out of bed and in the passage, with only her thin night-rail and bare feet. The door of Ginckel's room was open, and the moonlight was shining in at the uncurtained window as bright as day. To her surprise she saw that Mrs. Vanhomrigh was dressed in her new ball-dress, and had a lace commode on her head and a diamond necklace not fastened, but hanging loose among the trimmings of

her bodice. She was pulling her son's numerous clothes out of the drawers and closets, and rummaging in the pockets, talking to herself all the time like a person who is very much worried about something. When she had finished searching each garment she threw it from her blindly, and the fine silks and satins and gold and silver brocade of Ginckel's wardrobe lay tossed about on the floor, glittering in the moonlight. Essie came softly and took hold of her mother to lead her back to bed, concluding her to be walking in her sleep, though her eyes were open.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vanhomrigh, answering the touch, "I'm coming. But what is the use without the paper?"

"It is of no consequence, mamma," returned Esther.

"But it is, it is, I tell you," replied Mrs. Vanhomrigh, with a pettish sob. "They cannot be married without it. There is six months' notice required, and then the clerks will do nothing without the paper. Oh dear! oh dear! Whatever shall we do?"

And she went on lamenting incoherently to herself, beginning words and not finishing them. Esther again tried to draw her away, but in vain.

"I will find it, mamma," she said, "if you will tell me what it is."

Mrs. Vanhomrigh sat down on the end of the dismantled bed; her eyes had lost their fixed stare, and glittered feverishly. She looked ghastly ill and aged as she sat there in the moonlight in her ball-dress, shaking her head with a smile half-sprightly, half-knowing.

"Tell Essie!" she said, as though to herself. "No, no, that would never do; Essie must not know a word about it. How surprised she will be, to be sure! Essie, salute her ladyship——" and she began to laugh, swaying herself about and exclaiming in her amusement as incoherently as she had lamented. It came on Essie with a shock that her mother was not merely sleep-walking, but delirious; and also that there was some secret, probably an unpleasant one, on her mind. Her first impulse was to fetch old Ann,

but she reflected that she was no longer a child to run to her nurse in every difficulty, and that if any disclosures were to be made, it was as well she should be alone to hear them. No longer afraid of awaking her mother, she put her strong arm round Mrs. Vanhomrigh and spoke authoritatively to her. Mrs. Vanhomrigh yielded, and went down to her own bedroom in silence. But when her daughter began trying to take off her dress, which in spite of its elaborateness she had laced and arranged without any mistake, it seemed to suggest to her again the idea of making her toilette. She flew to seat herself before her pretty heart-shaped mirror, and called hurriedly for more lights.

"My necklace!" she cried, putting her hand to her throat, "I'll not go without it. Lady Peterborow herself will not have such stones, and Moll will be glad to show the fine jew'ls are not all on one side of the house. Make haste—my patch-box, you slut—the rouge! Sure I look frightfully. Ah, well—once I was the gayest, handsomest young miss in Dublin, and sighing won't bring it back. But the paper—don't let them go to church without that cursed paper."

Esther was cutting the lace of her smart be-ribboned stays, and undressing her again as quickly as possible. Then with an effort she lifted her mother's wasted form—how terribly light she had grown!—laid her in bed and stood by to see that she did not again rise. Esther remained half standing, half leaning on the bed, for more than an hour, during which her mother rambled intermittently in a manner that doubly alarmed her, both because it showed Mrs. Vanhomrigh to be more seriously ill than she had thought, and also because of the mysterious trouble to which she alluded in her wanderings. The names of Lord Mordaunt and Molly, confused with talk about Ginckel and papers and money, were perpetually recurring. But Mrs. Vanhomrigh's wanderings grew more and more intermittent, and by the time it grew light she was sleeping. Esther called old Ann and went herself, not to sleep, but to

dress. The vague anxiety with which she had seen Molly go out had returned upon her more strongly than ever, and she wondered why her sister did not return. The moonlight night had turned into a grey morning, and it was chill with the chill of dawn; but when she was dressed she opened one of the front-parlour windows, and leaned out into the little iron balcony. St. James' Street was at the centre of the fashionable world, and the traffic had not yet ceased in it A group of sedan-chairs came down it just as she looked out, but some turned off towards St. James' Square and the rest in other directions. When the street was quite empty except for a few belated foot-passengers, a chaise came round the corner of Piccadilly. Esther had good eyes and she recognized the liveries, the horse and the vehicle itself at once. There were two servants in the box-seat, and one of them had a shawl thrown carelessly round his neck over his livery, presumably to protect him from the morning air. Esther observed that it was extremely like her own, the like of which she had never seen in all London. The coachman, half asleep or intoxicated, was driving carelessly, and just as the equipage passed the Vanhomrighs' house the horse stumbled badly, bringing his knees within a hair's-breadth of the stones, but recovering himself. The footman with the shawl threw it off on the top of the chaise and jumped down to see if the animal had scraped his knees. Esther looked straight down on the shawl and saw it to be not only identical in colour and pattern with her own, but to have the identical large brown stain at one corner which hers had always had, and which Ann had often tried vainly to remove. The sight of the shawl her sister had been wearing on Lord Mordaunt's chaise, gave her a shock; by an irresistible impulse she rushed down to the front door to see who was in the carriage, but by the time she had unbolted and opened it, the equipage was rattling down the street and away in the direction of Chelsea. She went upstairs to her sister's room, locked the door and took away the key. All was quiet in the street now. There

was nothing more to be done at present, but wandering about the house like an unquiet spirit, she met Ann just outside her mother's door, and she could not help saying :—

"Ann, Miss Molly has not come home yet."

Her haggard eyes met Ann's as she spoke, and the old woman turned a shade more ash-coloured than she already was looking, less at the speech than at the manner of it.

"Lord love us, Miss Essie!" she cried, and then after a pause : "Maybe she went back along of Mrs. Harris."

"Why should she?" returned Esther, with the impatience of a person in pain. "Mrs. Harris is lodging in Park Place—'tis scarce three minutes' walk from here."

"Let me run and see, Miss Essie," said Ann.

Esther shook her head.

"I would not have them know she is not returned. I will go round myself as soon as I can decently rouse them, on pretence of asking my cousin to direct me to a good physician for the mistress."

"May the Lord heal and preserve her!" replied the old woman solemnly. "I'll go pray. 'Tis all I can do, and it seems little use ; and yet I warrant 'tis more use than a shop-full of 'pothecary's stuff."

So Esther roused her cousin, insisting on a personal interview with her at an unreasonably early hour. Mrs. Harris came in yawning in a bed-gown, and heard how her aunt had been taken ill in the night, and how much, as Mrs. Vanhomrigh disliked doctors, one must certainly be called. And all the time Essie's anxious eyes were fixed on her cousin, in hopes that she would begin to explain that Molly was under her roof. Something indeed she said about Molly presently.

"Sure, then, 'tis all the more reason Cousin Moll had better have left the ball in my company last night, and as a married woman, my dear, I must needs inform ye I thought it vastly strange conduct her letting this young Lord Mordaunt drive her home in his chay."

"Did she so?" asked Essie, with trembling lips. "I—I—have scarce had time to inquire. She is sleeping very sound; she will not wake before noon, or after. 'Twas an indiscretion; but you must understand a message reached her, and she thought to get home the faster. Pray accept my excuses, Cousin Harris, and my thanks, and good-bye to ye."

When Essie left her cousin's lodgings, she turned at once and walked in the direction of Bury Street. She was only a girl of three-and-twenty, and the anxiety and responsibility of the situation seemed more than she could bear alone. Meanwhile a note which had been sent to Twittenham was finding its way in the postman's bag to St. James' Street, to tell her Swift was gone. At the moment when she stood on the threshold of his lodgings, he was riding slowly out of the Angel Inn at Oxford on the last stage of his Berkshire journey. The news of his departure was a great blow; she had not indeed time or attention to spare for herself in the character of the forsaken lover, but she felt that this desertion threw her back entirely on her own resources in a situation so critical for others.

With a sensation of vague anger against Swift and the whole world, she turned away from his abandoned lodgings—an anger that was unreasonable enough, but served the useful purpose of bracing her to meet her difficulties. Mrs. Vanhomrigh was still asleep when she got home again, and she could think of nothing better to do than to go up to Molly's room and ransack it for anything that might throw some light on her relations with Lord Mordaunt, or the money matters which in Mrs. Vanhomrigh's wandering talk had been connected with these. She found a sheaf of notes from Mordaunt, remarkable only for a certain disagreeable self-confidence, and for being better written and spelt than the *billets-doux* of most of Molly's fashionable admirers. She glanced through them, and through a packet of borrowed verses in various hands and variously inscribed: *To Chlöe; To Clarinda; To Phillida.* But none of them showed signs of coming from Mordaunt. Indeed they had

all been laughed over in the family circle before now, when they had arrived by the threepenny post, or been slipped into Molly's muff. Baffled here, she next marched into Ginckel's room, with the determination that nothing there should be sacred from her search. The wardrobe had been turned out the night before. There was, however, a small standing desk in the room with an upright cupboard on the top; the cupboard was open and had papers in it; bills, receipts for cosmetics, and *billets-doux* in feminine hands, even worse spelt than those in Molly's desk, were mixed in careless confusion. The desk part was locked, and the same key did not fit it, nor did any on her own bunch. There then, if anywhere, must be something of importance. She pulled at the lid and shook it with all her might, but in vain, and, furious with rage at the strength of the lock and her own incapacity, looked round for some instrument wherewith to force it. One or two rapiers hung on the wall, and among them a short sword. At a bound she was on the table above which it hung, had snatched it from the wall, and, leaping down again, was at the desk once more. For a minute or two the tight-fitting lid refused to admit the blade, but at length the point got a grip of it. She thrust the sword in and out on the other side with the energy of rage, and, bringing her strength to bear on the blade, endeavoured to turn it. For a moment the blade bent, and then, with a crackling sound and a splintering of wood, the desk flew open, disclosing its hoard of documents, and, throwing the sword down clanging on to the boards, she hastily turned over the papers. Almost on the top lay a folded one, sealed with the Mordaunt arms. She opened it, and red in Ginckel's handwriting :—

"*I, Ginckel Vamhomrigh, Colonel in Her Majesty's service, do hereby promise to pay Thomas Mordaunt, Viscount Mordaunt, four thousand pounds, to be paid one thousand at a time on each quarter-day from this present date, September the 8th,* 1712 *; and I also promise to ask no interest for the said money, on the conditions agreed to by the said Thomas Mordaunt.*"

This appeared to be only a copy of some document, but within was another paper, signed, sealed, and formally witnessed. It ran thus :—

"*I, Thomas Lord Mordaunt, promise to repay the said four thousand pounds within three months of my coming of age, or, in the event of my not doing so, to marry Miss Mary Vanhomrigh, sister of the above Ginckel Vanhomrigh, within the same time.*"

Esther stared at the strange document for a few minutes, the line on her forehead deepening as she stared ; then with a cry of anger and disgust she threw the paper from her, and it fluttered to the ground by the side of the sword.

Had Ginckel paid the money, and if so where had he got it? The first question was soon answered, for Lord Mordaunt's receipts were there, and the answer to the other Esther guessed only too easily, before the letters lying before her had made it clear. It was more difficult to say why Ginckel had kept these letters. It may have been to remind himself of certain details concerning the family funds which they incidentally noted ; it may have been merely for the same mysterious no-reason that often induces people to keep incriminating correspondence. He had for some years been sole trustee of his youngest sister's property, his brother who had shared the trust with him having died abroad. It was invested in the business of the flourishing mercantile house to which his father and brother had belonged. From that business nothing could be withdrawn at less than six months' notice, and it was so arranged that one-third only of the capital could be withdrawn at any one time, an interval of three months having to elapse between the withdrawal of each portion. The whole sum amounted to six thousand pounds ; a much more considerable fortune then than it would be now, especially at the high rate of interest it was earning. How Ginckel had raised the thousand pounds immediately required on Setemper 29, 1712, Esther did not understand, but in March, 1713, he had, after due notice given, withdrawn two thousand of Molly's capital. In the end of June of the same year

he had been detained in a French prison, and had been obliged to empower his mother to receive and pay the next two thousand, not indeed informing her of the precise terms of the bargain, but persuading her that by laying Lord Mordaunt under this obligation, she was greatly facilitating that match of Molly's she had so much at heart. With Mrs. Vanhomrigh to desire a thing very much meant to consider it as good as obtained, and so she had long regarded Mordaunt as virtually her son-in-law. Consequently she had at the time felt little scruple in obeying her son's behest, though she had sufficient delicacy not to tell Molly about it. Esther she was of course forbidden to tell. But as the months went on, and Mordaunt came of age, and yet, even to her sanguine eyes, appeared not in a "coming-on disposition," she became very uneasy. She had never kept a secret before, and never before in all her gay, thoughtless life done anything really wrong. Now she was conscious that she had helped her son to rob her younger daughter, and though it had been done by both entirely in Molly's interest, the anxiety she suffered lest the money thus taken should be gone without return, had done much to hasten the progress of her disease.

The details of the business were of course not all to be found in the letters which Esther looked through, but there was quite enough to give her a pretty clear idea of what had occurred. She saw Ginckel, ever the most foolish and futile of schemers, baiting the hook, her mother standing by, impetuous, prompt as usual to share his self-complacent view of himself and his projects; saw only too clearly the shrewd young object of their attention making the most out of their fatuity, with many a private or, worse still, public sneer at it. "Good God," she thought, "he has the right to despise us." And if Mordaunt could become more hateful to her than he was before, he became so.

She closed the desk again, but it was so damaged that, had she wished, she could not have concealed her raid upon it. She looked at it with a bitter smile,

and pressing down an ugly splinter with her finger, "He will protest 'twas most dishonourable conduct," she said to herself. "Female treachery—that is what he will call it," and she laughed aloud. It was a strange brief burst of laughter that startled herself, and made her jump up from the chair by the desk, and turn to flee from the room.

The sword still lying on the floor caught her eye. She took it up, and feverishly handling the blade, "Oh that I were a man!" she thought; "I would kill him, kill him without mercy." Then she threw it away from her again, for it was only by feminine weapons that she could hope to make her way into Peterborough House. She dressed herself very carefully in a new blue damask dress and her best lace Steinkirk; tried on a Leghorn hat, and discarded it in favour of a hood which was more stylish and becoming. All this, not with the pleasure of a girl adorning herself, but with the stern care of a duellist preparing his weapons. The fatigue she had felt the evening before had entirely disappeared in the excitement of the succeeding hours; she was pale indeed, but not haggard, as a person of less perfectly robust *physique* must have been after such a vigil, and the look of defiant determination that she wore became her face more than the soft bloom it had lost.

As she came downstairs she saw a fat man with a colossal peruke and a big cane standing on the lower landing to get his breath. It was the doctor come to see Mrs. Vanhomrigh, and she must stay her impetuous course, which seemed about to take her at one bound across St. James' Park to Peterborough House, in order to answer and ask questions. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had slept, and was much better for the time. The doctor's practised eye saw on her face the look of one mortally stricken, but the science of the day did not enable him to name her malady and pronounce her doom. He talked a long time to conceal his helplessness, prescribed nauseous physic, and went. Mrs. Vanhomrigh called Esther back as the two left the room. Her indomitable spirits had risen again, in spite of illness and anxiety.

"My love," she said, "I'm surprised at your impudence in bringing that creature to see me. When I'm inside a hearse, you may put him outside of it for an ornament, if he's to your taste, but I swear he shall not come near me again while I live."

"Oh, mamma, do try his physic before you are so determined against him."

"Faith, I'll try it. There's poor old puppy sadly wants putting out of his misery, but I knew not how to accomplish his end; this physic comes most fortunately. But tell me now, Hess, how did Molly divert herself last evening?"

"I cannot tell, mamma. She is not awake."

"The lazy hussy! I warrant then things went well, if she slumbers so soundly. She has pleasant dreams, no doubt. What will you wager me, miss, that all is not settled between her and Mordaunt? Now never look cross for it—I believe that match is made in Heaven, and will be, and a prettier young couple you'll not find in all England and Ireland too."

"Pray, mamma, sup up this; 'tis good chicken broth, such as I know you love."

"It has an ill taste to-day, my dear, and I will none of it. I am all impatience to see Moll; send her to me as soon as she wakes."

"Mamma, I entreat you to keep quiet and not agitate yourself. Old Anne shall come to you, for I am forced to go out on business."

The word startled Mrs. Vanhomrigh.

"What business?" she asked sharply.

"Mr. Lewis has heard of a tenant for the house at Cellbridge," returned Esther, prevaricating with unusual glibness.

Her mother turned uneasily on her pillow.

"Ah!" she moaned, half to herself, "I wish Ginckel had not gone away."

"So do I, mamma," replied Esther significantly; and leaving the patient in charge of Ann, she called a hackney-coach and drove off in the direction of Peterborough House, more calmly and despondently than she would have done had she started an hour earlier in the first flush of her wrath. When she

caught sight of its high surrounding walls, she could not but think how she and Molly and Swift had passed and commented on them merrily more than once, when they used to "hobble," as he called it, to Chelsea and back that summer he had lodged there, and had been ill and wanted a great deal of nursing and cheering. But it was a passing thought, for the iron gates opened and the business of the moment again absorbed her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lord Peterborough, though an early riser, was not yet fully dressed. He sat over his dish of chocolate in his velvet bed-gown and night-cap, relaxing his mind with a new comedy. He was in particularly good spirits, as he had just received a letter informing him that Her Majesty was better again, and if only she would last through the summer, he believed he and Bolingbroke and the rest of them would certainly be able to bring in James III. Not that he cared a pin about the Stuarts and Divine Right, but he did care whether his own party or the opposite one finally triumphed. His money matters, too, were more flourishing than usual, in spite of Lady Peterborough having insisted on the payment of a long outstanding debt to her, in order that she might save her son from the consequences of his own folly and extravagance. So being in no particular dread of duns, he considered the matter when Adriano, his Italian valet, told him there was a lady below demanding a private audience.

"Is she young, Adriano, very young?" he asked in Italian. "Thou know'st my taste; I would have no woman but the Queen live past five-and-twenty. Is she young and tolerably pretty?"

"*Già*, Excellence, the lady is young and beautiful. But most beautiful!" And Adriano, who was a fresh importation, fell into an attitude of rapture.

Peterborough looked at him doubtfully.

"The dog takes every carroty miss for a beauty," he muttered, finishing his chocolate and meditatively folding up a fine fringed napkin.

"Well, Adriano," he resumed at last, "thou canst show her across the vestibule into the Venetian parlour. In that way I shall see enough of her to decide the matter."

So as Esther paused in the middle of the large marble-paved entrance hall, while Adriano was tying his shoe-ribbon, her keen young eyes caught sight of a small elderly face peering from behind the balusters, surmounted by a velvet night-cap. She smiled ironically to herself, recognising it as Lord Peterborough's and guessing his object.

Twenty minutes after, when she was ushered upstairs, he looked as she had seen him do in the Mall and at assemblies : an alert, upright little figure well dressed in brown and buff, with a pair of blue eyes still lively and piercing, and a once-handsome face, whose wrinkles were half concealed by touches of paint and the shadow of a flowing flaxen peruke. He bowed with his jewelled hand on his heart as she came in, and she returned the bow with as fine a curtsey as ever he saw in his life. Adriano discreetly retired.

"This is indeed an unexpected happiness, madam," he said, handing her to a chair. "The stars indeed smile upon me this morning."

She was evidently a lady, well-bred, well-dressed, young and handsome too. Was she a petitioner for his interest with some Minister for a place, a fair Jacobite, or—pleasing thought—a romantic miss, enamoured of his reputation?

"My Lord," she replied, "my name and person cannot be known to you as yours are to me, although we have acquaintance in common." An instinctive, unreasoning pride made her avoid using the name of Swift, with whom Lord Peterborough was intimate. "I must then present myself to your Lordship—Mrs. Esther Vanhomrigh, Junior."

She spoke calmly and with dignity, but Peterborough's quick eye noted the nervous quiver of her

lip and the knitting of her brow, and he hastily concluded himself to be what the French call in good fortune. He bowed again, looked at her critically, and saw one or two quite remarkably fine points about her.

"Vanhomrigh," he repeated smiling, and thinking of her appearance more than of what he said. "Now where have I heard that name? Believe me, madam, had I ever set eyes on you, I could not have forgotten the least circumstance that concerned you."

"I trust that is encouraging enough," he thought; "Gad, I shall be in love in five minutes more by the clock."

"My Lord," she said, after a pause, "my business is of a nature so serious to me, though I am aware it may appear trifling to you, that—that—I scarce know how to open it to your Lordship."

Lord Peterborough, confirmed in his impression, would have liked to fall on his bended knee, and kiss the hand that was clasping and unclasping the arm of her chair, but fearing he could no longer do so conveniently or gracefully, he sat down and taking it delicately in his own, touched it with his lips.

She withdrew her hand hastily, and speaking with determination continued:

"'Tis as master of this house, I appeal to you, for I must beg you to have it searched. 'Tis my unhappy belief that your son has my sister somewhere concealed on these premises."

Lord Peterborough jumped up again, a little mortified to find himself not, as he had supposed, the object of a romantic passion on the part of this fine young woman, but not despairing of some success with her all the same.

"If the lady resemble you, madam," he replied, "my son is indeed enviable. But I believe Heaven doth not make these fine creatures in pairs."

"My Lord," she asked, with a sudden, disconcertingly direct look, "do you know if my sister is here?"

Peterborough, who was never still for long together, walked a few steps and took snuff.

"Confound the woman!" he thought. "What's her sister to me or Mordaunt either?"

He pretended to consider.

"Hath she a pair of eyes with all the charming softness of the blue, and all the vivacity of the black? Hath she a white skin and lips of the most inviting red? Can she—oh, no, surely she cannot—boast a hand and arm as finely formed, as white, as soft, as that I had the honour but now to kiss?"

In Esther's eyes there was none of that glamour surrounding the Hero of Barcelona, the Tribune of the Coffee-houses, which had inspired Francis Earle with awe when he stood before him in that same room. She saw in him nothing but what in fact he was to her—a heartless old fribble. She knew that her best chance was to remain calm and trade upon his vanity, but she also knew that her indignant impatience was fast getting the better of her diplomacy. So far, however, it showed itself only in the alternate paling and flushing of her cheeks.

"My Lord, you do so much honour to my poor charms, that 'tis plain you know nothing of my sister's. Yet I believe her to be in your house, detained there by your son."

Lord Peterborough shrugged his shoulders and smiled; he really could not understand why she should come complaining to him of his son's peccadilloes, but as she was rather attractive, he did not object to her doing so.

"*Que voulez-vous*, my dear miss? I am told our English fine ladies now-a-days divide themselves into the opposing factions of prudes and coquettes as openly as we men into those of Whigs and Tories. It cannot be that *you* have had the cruelty to join the prudes. I can assure you, child, that though people of fashion may censure your fair sister for form's sake, they have in general too much sense to be severe on the amiable weaknesses of a charming young female. Consider—'"Tis Love, 'tis Love that makes the world go round.' For myself, apart from war and politics, I have thought every moment ill-spent that was not devoted to the fair, and believe me a few years more

or less cannot cool the warmth of a heart such as this, or make me less entirely the humble servant of the ladies." And laying his hand on his heart as he alluded to it, he ended with a killing look at Esther.

"Have the goodness to send for Lord Mordaunt, my Lord. If my sister be here, as I feel too well assured she is," returned Esther, in a voice tremulous with indignation, "she is here against her will."

Lord Peterborough's temper began also to be ruffled. This young woman would end by being a nuisance with her eternal sister. After all she was not a great beauty. He laughed and tapped his snuff-box.

"Charming! Your fair sister is fortunate. She has got a lover who is a nobleman and a handsome fellow (for I am told the ladies find Mordaunt vastly handsome), and—he has carried her off against her will. That is the climax of good fortune, but more often boasted of than enjoyed. I will summon Mordaunt, though I warrant he will keep you waiting, for 'tis the laziest, most unpunctual dog in the universe."

But contrary to expectation Mordaunt appeared almost immediately, though sulky enough at being summoned by his father, when he had business of his own to attend to. He had changed a little since that autumn day at Windsor. He wore a Bolingbroke—that is, his own brown hair in curls, tied with a ribbon after the manner of the elegant and philosophic Secretary of State, and his face, though not less beautiful in its refined perfection of feature, was thinner and yet more pallid than before. Directly he came in he caught sight of Esther, and the sulkiness of his expression visibly increased. He saluted his father with respectful civility, but took no notice of her.

"You have the honour of Miss Van—Vanbrugh's acquaintance, I presume?" interrogated Lord Peterborough, impatient to hand the business over to his son, since it promised no amusement.

"I have, my Lord," replied Mordaunt, bowing ungraciously.

"Then why the devil can't you be civil? You're a charming, gay, good-tempered gallant for a pretty

woman, to be sure, and I'm half disposed to think 'tis true you have run away with one against her inclination."

"I don't know what your Lordship is pleased to talk about," returned Mordaunt, "but I think you should recognise the name of this—lady. Lady Peterborough told me you had been informed of the Vanhomrigh affair."

"Eh? What? Vanhomrigh? Yes, of course—I knew I had heard the name, but I could not for the life of me think where. Yes, now I remember. The woman that thought to buy the heir of Peterborough for a son-in-law with her paltry four thousand pounds."

Lord Peterborough was doubly mortified, first by finding his admiration so little appreciated by its object, then by his own stupidity in mistaking this City miss—Mordaunt had somewhat exaggerated the middling position of the family in his account of the Vanhomrighs—for a woman of quality.

Esther rose to her feet. She appeared not to notice Lord Peterborough's observation, but advanced a few steps towards Lord Mordaunt and paused. There was a minute's silence which no one broke by a movement; then in a low but imperious voice she said:

"Lord Mordaunt, where is my sister?"

"Your sister!" cried he, and swore an oath or two.

"Yes, my sister," she continued when he had done. "She left Lady Ponsonby's in your chaise last night—I have proof of it—and now I demand to know what you have done with her."

The young man looked at her for a minute in sullen disgust, and then, "Madam," he said, "on my honour, I don't catch your meaning. 'Tis none of my doing if Miss Molly has escaped from your watch and ward."

"Do you expect me to believe you, my Lord?" she asked, holding on to the back of a tall chair that happened to be near. "The circumstances forbid it. Where is she, if not with you?"

"With some one else, I presume, madam. Miss

Molly's admirers are so numerous that for my part I cannot venture to be positive."

"Thou infamous creature!" she cried. "None better than you know her to be all honour, except in so far as yourself may by some devilish device have deluded her."

In proportion as Esther's indignation overcame her, her antagonist's coolness became more settled, while Lord Peterborough did not conceal his contemptuous amusement at the scene.

"I assure you, madam," sneered Mordaunt, "I have not wit enough to do't. You sister is vastly too well trained to spoil a bargain by an indiscreet kindness. Let me do a Christian deed, and return blessing for cursing, by telling you I consider it a deuced deal more likely that, finding your humble servant not to be had at her price, she has carried off some gallant of fortune to the Fleet, than that she has been carried off by him to some more agreeable *villeggiatura.*"

A Fleet wedding was not so uncommon an affair but that Esther might have believed him, if she had not been too well convinced that Mordaunt was the only man who could have persuaded Molly to such a step. She was silent a minute, looking on the ground and endeavouring to calm her excitement.

"My Lord Peterborough," she said, "'tis impossible for me to accept this young man's denial, seeing I have such good reason to believe that my sister left Lady Ponsonby's in his company. Will you, as master of the house, have the goodness to procure me the certainty whether she is or is not in it?"

Now a miracle had lately happened. Lord Peterborough and his lady and his son had found a subject on which they were all at one. This was the subject of the Vanhomrighs, whom they not unnaturally regarded as having attempted to catch the heir to an earldom by the stupidest and most barefaced of devices. Besides, it would have been Peterborough's natural inclination to take a man's part against a woman in any case; this humble servant of the ladies habitually regarding them as players on the opposite side in a game where there were no rules of honour.

"I vow, madam, you have a great deal of assurance," he replied. "Your money, that is your mother's, has been paid down, and you have no more grounds for extortion. I tell you all this pother about a trifling amour concerns me not, and I beg you will not continue to besiege and annoy me."

"Rest assured, my Lord, I shall besiege and annoy you by every means in my power," returned Esther. "I know the law gives us women the least possible justice, yet my sister is a minor, and it cannot be that you can forcibly detain her without punishment."

Lord Peterborough laughed disdainfully.

"'Tis a very tender force, I warrant, has been necessary to detain the pretty creature. Madam, your conduct is ridiculous. I wish you a very good morning."

"Farewell, Miss Vanhomrigh," added Lord Mordaunt, with a cynical smile. "I desire that our acquaintance may cease. Present my adieux to the fair, the chaste Miss Molly, when next you meet her."

Father and son were looking in her direction, but their eyes seemed simultaneously attracted to some object beyond her.

"Coward!" said Esther in a low voice. "You can insult her with impunity. Oh that I were a man, or had at least a man by my side!"

The moment of silence, during which she slowly loosed her hand from the carved chair, was to her a long pause of despair. Then a voice behind her said—

"Essie!"

Peterborough and Mordaunt had already perceived that a door, which appeared to form part of a bookshelf in the back of the room, had opened, and a young man in a travelling dress was standing in the doorway. As Esther finished speaking he advanced a few steps towards her. It was he who had said, "Essie."

Esther turned and looked at him in bewilderment. Then—"Francis—Cousin Francis!" and she ran to him and clung to his outstretched hand and arm like a drowning creature. "Oh, by what miracle?"

"By luck, Hess, very good luck, if I can be of service to you. My Lord Peterborough, there's some mistake here. This gentlewoman is my cousin, and I cannot submit to see her used with disrespect, even by your Lordship. As to Lord Mordaunt, I see no reason why I should submit to anything from him."

Francis Earle's habitually cold and almost nonchalant way of speaking made it possible for Lord Mordaunt to overlook anything provocative there might be in his concluding remark.

Lord Peterborough hastened forward rubbing his hands and laughing, partly in slight embarrassment, partly in pleasurable surprise.

"Faith, my dear boy, I'm very pleased to see you, and sorry you should find us and your cousin engaged in a trifling dispute. I own we should have been more patient of a lady's tongue. 'Tis the privilege of the fair to use it, and I make Miss Vanhomrigh my very humble excuses."

He took Francis by the shoulders and embraced him on both cheeks in the foreign fashion—a mode of salutation to which the young man submitted but awkwardly.

"How cam'st here, lad? I scarce expected you would reach Dover till last evening, nor London till this."

"I came over yesterday with a favourable wind, my Lord, and rode hither straight. Joseph let me in about six o'clock this morning, but I would on no account disturb your Lordship. He showed me into the closet yonder, and I fell asleep on the bed there."

This was not the first meeting between father and son since they had made each other's acquaintance. They had again met in Germany, where his Lordship had heard a most gratifying account of the young man's courage and conduct as a soldier.

"On my honour," said Lord Peterborough, smiling with pleasure at Francis' account of his journey. "I myself could hardly have used greater expedition."

"My Lord," replied Francis, "tis enough for me to have satisfied you. But I have here a private concern to which you must allow the *pas ;* for this young

gentlewoman is the daughter of the lady who reared me up, as I have told you, and to whom you must therefore be sensible I am very much beholden."

"Oh, ay, no doubt," returned his Lordship, good-naturedly; "I believe I remember some such matter," and he was back at the fire-place, taking snuff. Francis had said little, and he had remembered less of the boy's earlier circumstances.

"Essie," said Francis, taking his cousin's hands, but looking at Lord Mordaunt with a look that had more meaning in it than his tone, "I heard you wish for a man at your side, and here is one you have every right to command, if you will do him the honour. Tell me, what should you do, if you were a man?"

Essie had all this while been standing close to him, scarcely raising her eyes from his coat-sleeve, somewhat bowed, and at once weakened and comforted by his presence. At this question she straightened herself suddenly, and turned about almost with a bound in the direction of Mordaunt.

"I would kill him," she cried, and pointed at Mordaunt with her fan.

"What—for a word, Essie?"

"For word and for deed, Francis. 'Tis proven that he took our Moll from a ball last night in his chaise, on some excuse he would take her home, but she never reached home. You know Moll—all honour—all virtue;" and leaning her elbow on a high shelf of the bookcase, she covered her face with her hand and began to weep. "God knows where she is," she whispered.

Francis looked down and bit his lip a moment, but showed no other sign of emotion. It was perhaps for this reason that Mordaunt thought him but a half-hearted, as well as an insignificant antagonist.

"My Lord," he said, speaking deliberately, but addressing Peterborough, "I could wish this business had fallen to some other man, but you see how I am situated. My Lord Mordaunt, 'tis far from my desire to push matters to an extremity, but I must ask you for some explanation of this circumstance. My cousin

is naturally agitated, and may have been hasty in her accusation."

Mordaunt from the vantage of his great height looked down at Mr. Earle very coldly from under his full drooping eyelids.

"Who is this, my Lord?" he asked of his father, indicating the young man by a nod.

Peterborough, who was weary of the matter, and had betaken himself to his toothpick for occupation, at this point showed more interest.

"'Tis a friend of mine, a young gentleman, on whom I set a value," he replied sharply.

"Friend?" repeated his son, looking steadily at Francis. "I thought he had been something nearer."

"I care not to deny it," returned Peterborough.

"I heard as much from Germany. He certainly favours brother John, who, poor dog, was not the beauty of the family."

"If you must talk of me, let it be to me, my Lord," interrupted Earle. "But no matter. What I ask you is, if there is any truth in this accusation concerning Miss Mary Vanhomrigh."

Mordaunt looked at him again with a cold but bitter anger which Esther's attack had not been able to provoke in him.

"Damn the fellow," he said. "I am not here to answer his impertinent questions, and I shall not. If my father chooses to let his base-born brats eat up his fortune, I must suffer for't in mine; but I'm not forced to submit to an acquaintance with 'em."

"You'll not answer my question?" asked Francis very deliberately again. Then after a silence—stepping up to him—"No? Well, I'll open your mouth—or close it for you;" and he struck Mordaunt on the mouth with his open hand.

"Francis!" cried Peterborough, half in enjoyment, half in deprecation of his conduct.

Mordaunt was livid with rage.

"He shall fight me, my Lord, indeed he shall!" cried Francis, stamping his foot.

Mordaunt, who had a cane at his wrist, raised it and struck suddenly and savagely with it. Francis

leaped back, and received the blow on his lifted hand instead of on his face, at which it was aimed.

"My Lord," said Mordaunt, taking up his hat and digging his cane into the carpet, "I suppose I need not expect you to bid your servants turn out this insolent fellow. I wish you a good morning. I am for Windsor."

"What? Mordaunt, I say! My God, sir! You'll not accept a blow?" cried Peterborough, scandalised.

"I have returned it, my Lord," replied Mordaunt.

"I must have satisfaction for Miss Vanhomrigh and for myself," said Francis, placing himself between Mordaunt and the door.

"Ay, certainly; 'tis a matter for honourable satisfaction," announced Peterborough gravely, coming forward to act as umpire in the interesting game. "I regret it" (the regret was not very visible in his manner), "but there is certainly no choice. Mr. Earle is a soldier and a gentleman, Mordaunt, and you cannot refuse him."

"*Cannot* refuse him?" repeated Mordaunt, haughtily. "Ay, but I can, and mean to. Why should the heir of Peterborough pit his life against a foundling's? The stakes are not equal, gentlemen."

"H'm! the swords are," retorted Francis, and pulled out his blade, flashing it in his enemy's face. Peterborough gave a cry of genuine emotion, not at the appearance of the naked sword, but at the expression that passed over Mordaunt's face as he started back.

"Hell and damnation!" he cried. "Are you a coward, sir? And a son of mine? Oh, 'tis too much!" and he struck the air violently with his clenched right hand, in a passion of mortification.

Mordaunt recovered himself immediately, but the look of fear had been unmistakable. That he was a coward was not to be counted among his vices; it was his physical misfortune, as much as the trick of swooning that had grown upon him of late, and probably proceeded from the same weakness of nerves and circulation. In a way his cowardice was almost a source of virtue in him, for it was the one

defect of which he felt ashamed. To cure or at least to conceal it, he had often enough coerced and controlled that dear self that otherwise he existed but to pamper and respect. But in vain; an ironic fate ordained that he to whom his personal dignity was so sacred a thing should be conscious that any moment might expose him to the contempt of his equals—of those whom, not superiority, but overweening self-importance made him despise. Heretofore he had wonderfully concealed his weakness, which indeed seemed not proper to one so proud. It galled him to the quick to have let out the secret in a moment, he hardly knew how, to his father and to this fellow whom he despised and also hated, as a person to whom his father probably gave away money. However, he carried it off.

"Sure your Lordship is a truly amiable parent," he said, holding his head high. "You will be pleased to observe you are hounding on two of you own sons to fly at each other's throats, as though they were a couple of butcher's dogs."

Peterborough laughed loud, but not cheerfully.

"'Tis touching to hear such a fine domestic homily from Mordaunt," he cried; yet he could not but blush a little for himself. Then—"Mr. Earle, let him pass. 'Tis true, he is your brother and my son."

Francis obeyed, and Lord Mordaunt went out, without closing the door behind him. After a moment's hesitation Francis slipped out after him. Mordaunt was walking slowly down the wide, magnificent staircase, which began with a short flight of stairs and then branched off into two longer but equally broad flights on each side of a landing. Francis spoke his name, but he took no notice. Then, going down one step and leaning forward, with one hand on the broad polished oak rail of the balustrade, Francis spoke quickly and low to his back.

"You'll understand, my Lord, 'tis only my gratitude to Lord Peterborough that forbids my straight proceeding to the extremity. I care not a jot for our

kinship. If you have played the villain to my cousin, why, I'll kill you if I can. Whatever the event, I lose either my life or my good hopes of fortune by it; so never say the stakes are not heavy enough."

As he finished speaking, Mordaunt reached the landing. He went at the same pace a little way down the left-hand flight of stairs, without making any sign that he had heard his antagonist's words; then he did not so much look at Francis, as turn his face somewhat in his direction and show on it a smile of quiet, haughty mockery and immovable contempt.

CHAPTER XV.

MORDAUNT'S speculation had turned out singularly successful in the matter of the money which Ginckel Vanhomrigh had advanced to him. In the autumn of 1712 he had had heavy gambling losses. That evening at the Manor, when he and Ginckel had lost a considerable sum to Ponsonby and Raikes, had left him penniless and indebted; the next evening, when he played with Ginckel in hopes of retrieving something of his fortune, he lost again. He knew not where to turn, for the money-lenders between Peterborough and himself were tired of the name of Mordaunt, and it would also be the worse for him if his father should find him following too closely in his steps. Ginckel on the contrary was unusually flush, for he had had some great strokes of luck, and had also received an old debt due to the late Mr. Vanhomrigh. So it came about that after long talking round the subject, Mordaunt made a half-jesting attempt to borrow money from Ginckel, and Ginckel, also as it were in jest, declared himself to know too much of his Lordship's affairs to believe in repayment, unless some extraordinary penalty could be devised to induce it; such, for instance, as a written promise to marry—well, say, their old nurse in default. And somehow his sister presently took the place of the nurse. Mordaunt, whose mind moved

quickly when he pleased, saw here a double opportunity. He knew that his mother, stubborn as she had recently shown herself, would produce any sum at whatever cost rather than submit to his mis-allying himself. And he could talk to *her* about his honour, and she would believe in it. Meantime the young lady would be certain to hear of the matter from her brother, and he himself could allude mysteriously to a certain arrangement made in jest, which yet might turn to earnest; and in this way his pursuit of Miss Molly, in which he was just then beginning to take a surprising interest, would as he hoped be greatly furthered. As to Ginckel, being an exceedingly foolish person, especially when he thought to be a sharp dealer, he really believed that this written promise would have some binding effect on Mordaunt, who might come to consider marrying a toast preferable to raising the money. If the worst came to the worst, he thought, an action would lie for breach of promise of marriage. Mordaunt had a shrewd suspicion this would not be the case, as the promise had been made only to a third party. It was not wonderful that Ginckel should have no scruple in taking some of his sister's money for the purpose of securing her so fine a match—for the heir of Peterborough was a personage, and Ginckel did not know his pecuniary affairs so well as he had said. He had honestly intended to re-invest the money for her, should it be repaid. However when the moment of repayment came, hardly a week after the chance news of the Parisian lady's widowhood, the spirit of the gambler overcame him. He re-invested his sister's money indeed, but in his own matrimonial venture.

Mordaunt's speculation had succeeded perfectly so far as his mother was concerned. She had paid. But in another respect it had failed. He had takeu more pains for Miss Molly than he had ever intended to take for any woman, and he was sure she was in love with him; yet after more than eighteen months of troublesome courtship, he found himself no further than at the beginning. His comrades began to see through his enigmatic silences on the subject and to

taunt him with being either ridiculously backward or less beloved by the fair Vanhomrigh than he had hinted. If it had not been for the lively interest Ponsonby and Raikes succeeded in keeping up in his love-affair, he would have dropped it much earlier. His passion, if so it might be called, for Miss Molly had cooled; but this little rub she had innocently given his vanity must be atoned for, though with her heart's blood. It was therefore understood between him and Ponsonby and Raikes that at Lady Ponsonby's ball he was to engage Miss Molly in an elopement to Windsor. If the trouble of arranging the details of the elopement had fallen on him, it is possible he might have preferred losing some *prestige* to exerting himself so far. But this was undertaken by the others, who threw themselves into the business with boyish energy and enjoyment, undisturbed by any sense of their own villainy; which indeed was due mainly to their want of intelligence, that would have led them to accept any standard of conduct that was accepted in the world to which they belonged. And in this world of some hundred and eighty years since, a world where women had attained to quite an ideal state of ignorance, of straitened activities and helpless dependence on men, somehow that chivalry to which such a state of things is supposed mightily to conduce, was conspicuous by its absence.

When Mordaunt, languid but very handsome in his own hair and a white brocaded suit with gold embroidery, stepped out of his chair at Lady Ponsonby's, he was a good deal bored by the prospect of the elopement; all the more perhaps because of Ponsonby's garrulous excitement on the subject. By the time he had secured Miss Molly as his partner for the evening, however, his interest in the matter began to revive. She was looking so exceedingly pretty, and attracted so much attention, as he walked a minuet with her. The town would talk when it heard he had run away with the fair Vanhomrigh.

A ball in those days meant only a modicum of dancing for the individual, and even in Lady Pon-

sonby's long ball-room, not more than three couples could go through their minuet at a time. There was much conversation and walking about the reception-rooms and the marble terrace, which ran along the garden-front of the house, and on to which the ball-room opened by glass doors. It was a large handsome room, painted in fresco by an Italian artist with a jumble of architectural decorations and dishevelled gods and goddesses; and being all done with the facile, somewhat vulgar Italian cleverness, and being something foreign and new in decoration, it was the object of much admiration and comment. The front of the house was illuminated, and the terrace set with small tables of refreshments. Such of the company as pleased walked and sat there, and looked in at the dancers through the long windows of the ball-room. A few years later, when the great world went habitually to Ranelagh and Vauxhall, there would have been nothing very novel in the arrangement, but just then it was novel, and consequently delighted some of the guests and shocked others. Mrs. Harris was one of those whom it shocked, and she endeavoured to prevent Molly from going out on the terrace, alleging that she would catch a great cold though the night was still warm. Mr. Ponsonby flew at once to find Miss Vanhomrigh's shawl. Mrs. Harris meantime whispered in her ear that it was highly unbecoming for a young woman to walk out with gentlemen at that hour, and she trusted Molly meant to behave herself. Molly, who would not be corrected by Cousin Harris, answered out loud:

"Pooh, my good cousin, do you think decorum resides in the ceiling?" and she bestowed a smile of thanks on Ponsonby, who arrived with the shawl, but left Mordaunt to put it round her.

So Mrs. Harris, considerably huffed, remained indoors while Molly and a little party of other young people of whom she was the centre, ate iced syllabubs on the terrace; which being lighted both by lamps and the moon, and having the walls of the house on three sides, was certainly not a very dark

and dangerous wilderness for Lady Ponsonby's flock to wander in. Below it was a trim parterre freshly laid out with statues and flower-beds, and bounded on the other side by a square piece of water with four fountains in it. The fountains were new, but the water had formed part of the ornamental grounds of an older house, and down the sides of it ran pleached walks of fruit-trees. It was intended to have a display of fireworks on the terrace, but this was kept to the last so that the moon might not interfere with their effect. Now Molly was very anxious to stay for the fireworks, and also for the country-dances which were to wind up the ball. Indeed she would willingly have prolonged to any extent this delightful evening. She was too natural and too coquettish not to enjoy thoroughly all the flattery and attention which fell to her share; but it was not that in itself which made her at the height of enjoyment. It was the altered behaviour of Mordaunt, who from having been cold and neglectful of late, had suddenly more than resumed his former lover-like bearing. To any but a blinded eye his love-making must have seemed a poor thing at best, but with enough good-will there is no coldness that may not be construed to mean modesty, no silence that may not be supposed to cover tender thoughts.

Mrs. Harris, after the first half-hour of gratified curiosity and wonder at the fine people and things about her, began to feel her isolation in this world to which she did not belong. Her companion presented her to acquaintances, but as she had neither wit, beauty, easy manners nor the small personal interests in common with her interlocutors which usually go further than all three, they quickly passed on and left her as before. There are persons who find some entertainment in wandering about a crowd, practically invisible because unknown and unobserved, but Mrs. Harris was not one of these. She began to think she had a headache, and did not regret that she had so faithfully promised her husband to be home by midnight. Molly was of course unwilling to leave before the country-dances had begun or the

fireworks been let off, and there was again a difference of opinion between the two young women, each of whom mentally pronounced the other exceedingly selfish for sticking to her own point of view. Mrs. Harris, however, had the advantage, since she was in authority; but when she came to look for her charge she could not find her. Mr. Ponsonby was very forward in calling her chair and in helping her to seek, whereby he succeeded in preventing her from finding the delinquent. Then Lord Mordaunt came up with Molly's shawl over his arm, and in his slowest manner informed her it would be positive cruelty to the company to remove her fair cousin at this heathenish hour; that since Mrs. Harris was promised to go, Miss Vanhomrigh would not for the world detain her, but that the young lady had so far honoured him as to consent to take a seat in his chaise for her return home, as his Lordship would be passing St. James' Street on his way back to Peterborough House. At this Mrs. Harris, who naturally did not guess this stately young nobleman to be lying, waited not for confirmation of his tale, but bounced into her chair and back to her lodgings, to pour her indignation into the sleepy and quite unelectrified ear of her Mr. Harris.

After the minuets and the figure dances and the supper, the country-dances were to begin. These were to Molly, as to most other young people, by far the most delightful of all, in spite of the fact that Mordaunt never danced them. A man of quality owed it to himself to perform respectably in a minuet, just as he must be able when necessary, to take off his hat in a manner that should show his court breeding. But a country-dance was unnecessary; Mordaunt did not like it, and therefore pronounced it contemptible. To Molly's surprise, however, this evening, instead of handing her over to some more willing and active partner, he evidently meant to stand up with her.

"What, my Lord!" she cried with a triumphant smile, "recollect yourself! Here's a dance you have constantly declared to be meant for bumpkins at a

country wake, or 'prentices at Barthelmy Fair. You'll repent this before you are an hour older."

"No, no. I believe I shall be too happy," he replied with a smile. "You shall tell me how to do't. Only with your leave we will not lead off. Hark! the fiddles are beginning. Is it the Barley Mow or the French Rigadoon? I vow I can't tell the difference."

So they took their places, and all at once the two long gaily coloured lines of men and women, ranged in opposite rows, swayed forward like flowers in a wind, all bending together in the slow grace of the preliminary bow and curtsey. Up they stood again with a clink of swords and a rustle of silks, the first couples began to turn, and presently under the painted goddesses and the countless wax-lights, there was a long shifting maze of brightness and colour; of fair arching arms and jewelled hands, that rose and clasped and fell to the music; of young heads, blonde and brown, bright with flowers or starred with gems, winding and turning, crossing and re-crossing among the long soft flaxen perukes, dear to the heart of beaux. Innumerable diamonds flashed from white breasts or cloudy lace with the movement of the dance and the merry gestures of the wearers; painted fans fluttered joyously and rich petticoats passed billowing in and out amongst the stiffer lines of coat-skirts as rich. And as it went on the fiddles could not drown an occasional ripple of laughter, mixed with the ceaseless tapping of little heels and the murmur of broken talk. Molly, to whom usually the motion and the music of the dance were in themselves too delightful to allow of her greatly regarding her partner, did not lose to-night the happy sense that Mordaunt was there opposite. They danced several different dances. At last it happened, though scarcely by chance, that just as she and Mordaunt come to the end of the room near the glass doors, there was an explosion immediately outside them.

"The fireworks!" cried Mordaunt. "Deuce take the dancing!" and seizing her by the hand, he posi-

tively ran out of the window and down the terrace steps, snatching her shawl from Ponsonby as he went, and throwing it round her shoulders. Molly ran by his side, laughing and feeling as if this were only a new figure in the dance. In the parterre there was already a crowd assembled waiting to see the fireworks. Still holding Molly firmly by the hand, he passed through the edge of it and a little way down the pleached walk, before he dropped into a walk.

"Nay, miss, I'll not let you desert me," he said, as she showed signs of stopping; "I have a mind to see the fireworks across the water. They'll look finely. Pray now, dear Miss Molly, do not be cruel, but come and see 'em too."

Molly, excited, bewildered, and above all charmed by this swift impulsiveness so unlike his usual manner, gave a hasty assent. She had no sooner given it and was walking in silence by his side, than she felt curiously sobered. The rays of the setting moon gleamed on the spring foliage overhead, the air was sweet with the odour of the last hawthorn blossoms, and the sound of music, softened by distance, floated to them from the open windows of the ball-room. Had she ever pictured herself in a day-dream walking hand in hand with Mordaunt under such romantic circumstances, it would have seemed a thing too delightful to come true. But it was real, and far from enjoying the situation she was bitterly annoyed with herself for having consented to it, and yet ashamed to go back on her consent. It would have been easy at first to make an excuse for returning towards the terrace, but now at every step she took it seemed harder. She could only make up her mind not to stay long, and hope no one had recognised them as they passed through the dark parterre. As they turned the corner out of the pleached walk, which was not continued on the side of the water opposite the house, she thought she heard a cracking of twigs among the bushes.

"Oh!" she cried, in a low voice, "is there any one there? Or—or do you think 'tis an animal?"

"Pretty trembler!" returned Mordaunt. "Dost think there be lions in Marylebone? Nay, if thou art to be devoured, it shall be this way."

And putting his arm round her waist he kissed her several times. Now a kiss taken civilly, if no longer a form of friendly salutation, was still not held matter for offence; but there was a careless freedom in Lord Mordaunt's manner and conduct which greatly displeased Molly.

"Fie, my Lord!" she said.

Just at this moment they were aware of a banging and crackling and a dozen jets of multitudinous flames leaping up from the length of the terrace. They could hear the long-drawn "Oh!" of the crowd in the parterre. Molly started back out of the glare that came across the water into the shadow of a great thorn-bush just behind them. He followed her, nothing loth, since he had an uneasy suspicion that Tom Raikes, in spite of his promise to depart as soon as he had done his work, might be eavesdropping in the bushes by the path.

"Dear timorous charmer!" he said, "I protest 'tis lucky we were no nearer the fireworks, else you had been frightened to death. Come now, these arms shall protect thee." And he again put his arm round her. Molly started away pettishly.

"Tilly vally, my Lord! I mind not the fireworks a brass token—that is by comparison. But you must be sensible that I—that you—that we should be—be thought singular in fine, were we observed here."

It never occurred to Lord Mordaunt to suppose that Molly really disliked being there with him, but she was coyer than he had expected. Meantime there was his chaise waiting on the other side of the paddock, and perhaps Raikes in the bushes, ready to die with laughter should he be discomfited. This thought made him speak low and gave an earnestness to his wooing that it might otherwise have lacked.

"What! must Love be bound by the cold rules of the censorious?" he asked. "By heaven, my lovely charmer, 'tis impossible!" And the distant light

from the terrace, falling through the scattered leaves and blossoms of the old thorn, showed him sighing with his hand in his bosom. It was a becoming light, and he thought he had never seen Miss Molly look so pretty as she did now, standing there by the tree, half in shadow, with her serious, half-doubtful face and shining eyes lifted to his. He seized her hands and laid them on his bosom.

"Cruel, cruel fair! Is't possible thou hast no pity on this heart, that suffers all the torments and flames of Love? But yet 'tis you, enchanting creature, that inflict 'em. Do you not love me, charming Miss Molly?—O, I am sure you do."

As he ended the fireworks went out, leaving black darkness behind them.

"Yes, yes, I do," murmured Molly, after a little pause, and he felt her hands were trembling. This time she did not resent his kiss; but somehow the declaration which she had so often sighed for did not thrill her with bliss. The lover of her dreams, although he wore the name and face of Mordaunt, was a creature of the imagination, and the real man, had he been better than he was, would have suffered by the comparison.

"I am yours—O yes," she returned, in answer to a tender inquiry murmured in her ear. "But let us go back, pray let us go back now."

The fireworks broke out again on the terrace, and slipping from his arms she ran towards the pleached walk, followed more leisurely by Mordaunt. There was an iron railing across the end of the walk, with a gate in it, which had been open when they came through. Indeed, owing to the darkness, Molly had not observed it. Now the gate was closed. She pushed it with all her might, but it was evidently locked.

"Come, come quick, my Lord!" she cried, stamping her little high-heeled shoe impatiently. "Pray open this gate for me."

"Why, dear miss, 'tis locked," returned he, trying it. "This is very strange, but 'tis a spring-lock, and must have shut to behind us."

"Quick! Let us try the other side," she said, and was starting off, but he caught hold of her.

"My charmer, 'tis useless," he replied. "I believe 'tis years since the opposite gate was opened."

"O my Lord, can you not climb it?" asked Molly earnestly. Lord Mordaunt could not forbear laughing.

"Do you take me for a baboon, Miss Molly?" he asked. Then—"But what matter, my angel? You must not go. You must not leave me now, in this happy moment; 'twould break my heart. Sure you cannot love me if you will not stay an instant to hear me swear again I love you."

"O my dear Lord, think of my reputation," cried she anxiously.

"Reputation!—Distracting girl! I can think, I will think of nought but love. A kind fate has separated us from the crowd, but there's a way out yonder at the end of the paddock, and we'll fly together."

"Pray let us go that way and steal into the house again as softly as we may," returned Molly eagerly.

"'Tis this way," replied Mordaunt, pointing down a path in the opposite direction to the house; and following her close as she immediately hurried along it, he continued, laying his hand on her arm: "But if you contrive to slip in at the great door, and that in the plight you will be in when you get there, unobserved by half the footmen in London, why, the devil's in it. Besides though we now are near the house, the shortest road to it is a long way round and by a dirty foot-path, and you will be missed before you can possibly reach it."

Molly stopped.

"O Lord Mordaunt, I shall go distracted! Let us return and call for assistance; some one will certainly hear us."

"Dear miss, I thought you was so careful. What could give greater scandal than to discover yourself here?"

"Then let us go on," returned Molly, starting off again; "'tis plain we must go somewhere. Even

you, my dear Lord, will hardly propose that we should wait in the paddock till morning, to be let out when the cows are let in."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, he with his hand slipped under her elbow and sighing like a man desperate. And it was not every bit of it pretence, for he had really got interested in his part, which perhaps caused him to miss an opportunity. They now turned a corner and saw a bright speck of light, which he knew to be the lamp of his own chaise, showing a gate at the end of the path. He had not the least intention of carrying off Miss Vanhomrigh by force. The suburban road round the house would just now be full of coaches and chairs and linkmen, and so troublesome an affair was not to his taste. But could he have plausibly explained the position of the chaise, and persuaded her she would reach the house again quickest by jumping into it, he could have taken her far in this neighbourhood, which was strange to her, before she would have discovered the deception. But when they were approaching the gate, it seemed to him to be necessary to bring matters to a crisis.

"Ah!" she cried, "how glad I am to see the gate! But can it be locked?"

"'Tis open," he replied. "But, my sweetest girl," and he here took her hands and stood before her in such a way as to stop her passage, "my adored Miss Molly, you will gain nothing by this except the death of a devoted lover. For I assure you,"—and all the time he was kissing her hands—"I have determined not to survive it, if you refuse to be mine. No, I will not leave this place without you. You love me, I know it; and I love you, dear, charming creature, to distraction. Fly with me, fly with me immediately."

Mordaunt was surprised at his own fervour, and Molly at the coldness with which she listened to him. She did not take his proposal seriously, but supposed it to be a mere piece of boyish impetuosity and lover's raving.

"Fie, my Lord!" she said. "You know not what

you say. I'll marry you to-morrow if you please, and anywhere you please, but not without my mother's knowledge. This is foolishness. Pray, pray let us go on," and she pressed forward.

"Heavens, child!" he cried, still keeping close to her. "Do you not see these cold scruples come too late? They will seek for you in vain, and your return will be observed. Believe me, 'tis too late."

"I am surprised you should say so, my Lord," she returned warmly. "If my reputation should be lost, I have still my honour to consider."

"Honour, child!" he said, in the tone of one who smiles indulgently. "Why, you talk like a country wench. Yet you have lived in the world, and know that 'honour' is but a word it cheats fools with, and marriage—ye gods! How Love trembles and flies before the word! Leave talking of it, till thou'rt weary of me, and hast leisure to bargain with me for pin-money. Let's name nothing but Love. I find matter in it now for more discourses than ever I thought to make in a lifetime."

"Then, my Lord," she replied, in a steady tone of voice, the import of which he did not perceive, "I am to understand that your love for me is such that you propose I should fly with you impromptu, and leave talking of marriage till some more convenient time."

"Even so, my sweetest creature. I shall not keep my senses, I swear I shall not, if you refuse me. But sure, you'll never be so cruel. You see the light yonder? Look! 'tis the torch of Love to light us on our road."

"What I see appears more like the lamp of a chaise," she returned, with a sudden little tremulous laugh—for they had now got near the gate. "But no matter. Whither should it light us?"

"To Windsor, child," he cried triumphantly, and put his arm round her.

"How comes the chaise there, my Lord?" she asked, in a voice again steadied by such an effort that it sounded indifferent. "Whose is it?"

"'Tis yours, my angel, yours; that and everything else I possess."

So quick is thought that in the moment that he stooped his tall head to bring it close above hers, it passed through his mind that the game was won; at the expense no doubt of a confounded deal of talking, but somehow the eloquence had flowed with much less trouble than he would have supposed. As his curls brushed the fading flowers in Molly's hair, right in his face, fierce and direct as a blow, came the words—

"Liar! Base, treacherous creature! I detest thee!"

And as at a blow a man's wrath will blaze up to the height instantaneously, so at these words Mordaunt started away from her in a passion of bitter anger.

"Why, madam," he cried, "how long is it since you swore you loved me—loved me with all your dear little heart? Is't ten minutes or fifteen? Not twenty, I'll take my oath. You know you said you loved me, and I advise you for your own sake to stand by your words. If you don't, pray what excuse have you for being here? Answer me that, Miss Molly."

Molly, after that one burst of uncontrollable indignation, had regained an external calmness. "'Tis true, my Lord, I loved you; but you have very completely cured me of that folly."

"I perceive, Miss Molly. You loved the name of Lady Mordaunt, you loved the charming idea of figuring at a Birthday in the Peterborough pearls, and making the women die with envy of your fine match —one indeed that I admire you should pretend to."

"You have so insulted me by your conduct, my Lord, that your words are of small importance. Pray, has your Lordship's footman orders to lay hands on me, if I should pass the gate yonder?"

"Be easy, madam. I would put no force on a lady, save such as might give her an excuse for following her inclinations. I never imagined you was one to require that excuse. Indeed, madam, 'twill vastly surprise the gallants of your acquaintance to

hear of your virtuous behaviour; you that was so diverting, so free, so obliging a young woman. Had you been a prude now or a country hoyden, I had respected your innocence, but for you that know the world and jest at it to affect surprise at my design —ah! ah! 'tis very ridiculous."

"I have seen wicked men, my Lord, as I have seen the lions at the Tower, but I no more feared to find 'em among my private friends than I feared to meet a lion in St. James'. O, how have I injured you that you should use me thus shamefully? I own 'twas my folly to love you, but it deserved not this punishment."

"'Tis a lady's privilege to play the victim," returned Mordaunt, relapsing into his more usual sulkiness; and he continued, quite believing his own contention: "I have a better right than you, Miss Molly, to complain of deception. You encourage my love to the utmost, and when its violence makes me take the shortest way to win you, you affect horror and surprise at it. I might believe you merely a finished coquette, were it not for that matter of the money; but that discovers your design."

"What money?" asked Molly. "What do you mean?"

"Swear you know nought of it, madam. That's writ in your part. But you know enough to understand me when I say there's no victim in the case. You had your design on me, I mine on you. Neither of us has succeeded, and we are quits. But I will be generous and drive you back to Lady Ponsonby's, that you may make your curtsey at the last, and contradict any report that may have got abroad there to your disadvantage."

"I will accept nothing of you, perfidious man," returned she. "You may again deceive me. I will return, I will return at once, but not with you. O, I am mad to delay here!"

And before he had fully realised her intention, she had rushed forward, slipped through the iron gate, which was ajar, and disappeared into the darkness of the lane beyond.

When Mordaunt had so suddenly removed his arm from Molly's shoulder, her shawl had come off, having caught in the gold embroidery of his coat, and all the time he had been talking in this very unwonted state of excitement, he had been grasping it mechanically. He scarcely realised he had it till she had gone. He came to the gate and called her name once, but there was no response. He stood there a minute or so staring into the darkness ; then the footman got down and opened the door of the chaise. Lord Mordaunt flung him the shawl with a curse, got into the chaise, and pulling his hat over his eyes, ordered the coachman to drive to a genteel gaming-house which, late as it was, he had some hopes of finding open.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTHER'S expedition to Peterborough House ended more satisfactorily than it had promised to do. That is, the house was thoroughly searched, though without any result beyond the verification of the fact that Molly's shawl had been brought back there by Lord Mordaunt's chaise. She was now anxious to get back to St. James' Street, and Lord Peterborough, who out of complacency towards Francis was now all courtesy, sent a footman to show her the shortest path across Tuthill Fields to the Park. Francis accompanied her a part of the way, but was to return to Peterborough House, as he and his Lordship had certain matters of importance to talk over. The door in the high garden-wall of Peterborough House opened into a thick coppice of hazels overshadowed by taller trees, and the footpath wound for a little through a wilderness of nettles and briars, and such coarse grass as will grow under trees. But very soon it ran into one of the common walks of Tuthill Fields, and here the cousins parted.

While they were walking so far together, Essie had had time to hear how naturally the apparent miracle of Francis' appearance in Peterborough House had

occurred. Francis had, with that superfluous discretion that was his foible, respected a wish which Lord Peterborough had expressed early in their acquaintance, and which his Lordship himself had long ago forgotten. In obedience to it he had told the very few friends whom he had left behind him in England no more of his circumstances than that, owing to the unexpected patronage of a nobleman, he had been sent abroad to serve under Prince Eugene, in accordance with his own wishes. As to the nature of his business in England now, and the reason for so sudden and secret an arrival, that he did not at this time confide to Essie. The truth was he was employed as a trusty messenger to bring the last news from St. Germains to Peterborough, who purposed to find him employment in this way so long as the Queen lived, and afterwards to buy him a regiment in England. There was only one other person whose arrival on the scene could have been a greater comfort to Essie, and he was in Berkshire. The twenty months that had passed since Francis Earle left England had transformed him from a somewhat waspish, discontented youth into a man. Essie had had neither sufficient time nor calmness of mind to dwell on the alteration in him, but she felt it. Though the situation was really unchanged, it was with a lightened heart that she walked across the Park and turned up St. James' Street. In her absence Mrs. Harris had been to inquire after Mrs. Vanhomrigh, had gone all over the house to find her cousins, and now came to meet Esther with an ominous face.

"I am pleased to find my Aunt Vanhomrigh better, Cousin Essie; I felt sure Dr. Barker would do her a vast deal of good. I wish I could feel as easy about Cousin Molly; but I have rapped at her door till my knuckles ache, I have shaken it till I was tired, and not a sign has she made."

"O, Molly will sleep like the dead," returned Esther, "and very certainly I shall not waken her."

"I have looked through the keyhole," continued the inexorable Mrs. Harris, "and—well, there's a feeling about the room. Believe me, my dear

cousin," and here her eyes got very round and her voice very low and emphatic, "believe me that room is empty."

"It is, Cousin Harris. Here is the key," replied Esther, taking the key out of her pocket. "Now perhaps, having gratified your curiosity, you will have the goodness to hold your tongue for the honour of the family, or to say that my sister was seized with a sudden indisposition at the ball last night."

Mrs. Harris, conscious of having said something quite different to several people already, became somewhat red.

"I doubt 'twill be useless. Plenty must have seen the unfortunate creature go off with Lord Mordaunt."

"Did you see her go?" asked Essie. "How do you know she went?"

"How do I know? Lord ha' mercy, cousin, d'ye think I speak without book? Why, his Lordship told me himself. 'Miss Vanhomrigh will so far honour me as to ride home with me,' says he."

"He may not have spoken the truth," replied Essie; "oh, I wish I knew the truth!"

"I'm very much concerned for you and Aunt Vanhomrigh, and pity you from my soul," said Mrs. Harris, and she spoke sincerely: "but that your little baggage of a sister has run off with the young lord is as plain, as plain as——"

She paused for a comparison, and a voice from behind the door supplied it. "As a prophecy in Mr. Partridge's Almanack; and confound the scurvy event that proves it otherwise."

A voice from the grave could hardly have startled Mrs. Harris more. For all reply she turned round and fell into an attitude of astonishment. For Molly walked in, wrapped in a long shapeless frieze cloak with a hood which covered her head and half her face.

"Molly!" cried Esther. "Oh, where have you been?"

"I have had the foolishest adventure, my dear,"

replied Molly. "I have been knocked over by a hackney coach, and am scarce in my senses yet, I believe." And she threw off her cloak and showed a torn muddy dress, a very pale face with a bright red spot on each cheek and a cut on one, and a bruise on her temple. One arm too was bound up.

"O Moll!" and Essie flew across the room and laid her hands on her sister's shoulders. "Thank Heaven I see thee safe! And I have been to Peterborough House for thee this morning."

"So you thought I had gone away with Lord Mordaunt!" exclaimed Molly. "And you cried me over Peterborough House! I'll never forgive you."

And she turned and fled upstairs, leaving Esther to get rid of Mrs. Harris. This she did speedily, but whether the lady considered Molly's strange reappearance as a convincing proof of her innocence in the matter of Lord Mordaunt, is exceedingly doubtful. The question was how a young lady who was, or should have been, in a sedan-chair, got run over by a hackney coach, and that unobserved by her friends. The circumstance was suspicious, yet it grew quite naturally out of Molly's adventure with Lord Mordaunt. The way round to the front of the Ponsonbys' house from the back lane was, as he had said, much longer and more intricate than it seemed likely to be. When Molly hurried away in the darkness feeling very nervous and quite ignorant of the neighbourhood, she missed the footpath that would have taken her round to the house. She fled on and on along the high boundary walls of suburban properties, where here and there an oil-lamp over a gateway showed her the miry way she was treading, but never any turning in the desired direction nor any nocturnal wayfarer of whom she might ask her way. She continued walking and running, sometimes stopping to thrust her little silk-stockinged feet further into her shoes, which were limp with mud and the drizzling rain which was beginning to fall, or to draw her petticoats up closer round her, and becoming more and more frightened at the position in which she found herself. At last she reached a high

road, which she knew must be some distance from the Ponsonbys', and along which chaises, coaches and chairs were passing at no long intervals. She had now determined to go home as best she could, as, even if she could find her way back to the ball, she was not fit to appear there; so she walked along the road in what she took to be the direction of London. Meantime she kept a sharp look-out on the vehicles that passed her and was at last sure she recognised the liveries of a friend on a passing chariot. She ran after it, calling in vain to the coachman to stop, and it was then that she was knocked down and run over by a hackney coach. She lay there bleeding and insensible on the ground, and in these days would certainly have been conveyed to the nearest hospital. In default of that the driver, who was returning home and had no fare, drove her to a small tavern in the neighbourhood kept by a relation of his own. Molly remained there at first in a state of insensibility, and afterwards unable, owing to her injuries and the lack of hired vehicles, to return home. There was no great alacrity shown by her host or his neighbours to serve the guest so strangely thrown among them, and it was not till a carrier's cart came past the door on its way to the *Belle Sauvage* in Ludgate, that she was able to start on her homeward journey. So it happened that it was past eleven o'clock before she arrived in St. James' Street. Essie got from her only the barest statement of what had occurred. Now that the anger and excitement which had supported her through the adventures of the night had worn off, she was overwhelmed with shame and with misery of mind and body. She lay face downwards on the bed, and after answering shortly the first questions, would make no further response even to Essie's indignant denunciations of Lord Mordaunt, except to cry out that she wished she might never hear his name again, for 'twas Hell to her to hear it. Essie perceiving that she had, though very innocently, offended her sister, called Ann to undress her, and herself set off again to Peterborough House to inform Lord Peterborough and Francis of Molly's return. She would not stay

with Mrs. Vanhomrigh, whose questions and gay chatter about Moll would, she felt, even now be intolerable; for though Molly was safe at home again, the insult and the injury that she had received, and the scandal most likely to result from the adventure, prevented Esther from enjoying any ease of mind when she thought of her. She might well have waited till Francis arrived, which he had promised to do as soon as possible, but she was glad to find herself an excuse to escape from the house and was in a hurry to tell him what had happened.

She walked quickly across the Park, fearing to be caught in the rain, for the sky was extraordinarily dark; but this darkness, though partly caused by low heavy clouds, also arose partly from the direction of the wind, which was slowly bringing westward a vast deal of black smoke from the chimneys of the City, that something in the upper strata of the air prevented from rising higher and dissipating itself. Londoners were not then used to living in the atmosphere of Hades, and this deepening gloom in the very height of the day seemed strange, almost startling, to Esther. When she turned into the hazel coppice behind Peterborough House, the shadow of the foliage which was thicker than usual at that season, made a kind of dark-green twilight all about her. The way was short from thence to the garden-door, and the path ran straight till it came to a kind of small clearing, such as commonly occurs in coppices. That is, it was a clearing below, where there were some dozen square yards of bare brown earth, but above it was almost roofed in by the hazels and the meeting boughs of two large ilex trees. Just at this point the path took a turn round a great straggling bush before crossing the open space. Walking fast and absorbed in her own thoughts, Esther was close to this bush before she perceived with a start that there was something unusual passing in the open space beyond it. The day was very still, and as she quickly and silently drew nearer and peered through the leaves, she could not only see but hear the struggle that was proceeding; yet it was in a sense a

silent one. There was neither word nor cry audible, only the loud irregular breathing of men wrestling hard for the mastery, the slip or stamp of heavy feet on the sticky earth, and the occasional sound of a severe blow delivered with a heavy hunting-crop. The victim of these blows was Francis Earle. As he came out of the narrow path into the open space, two men had leaped on him from the thicket, and seizing him on either side without giving him the least chance to pull out his sword, held him fast in spite of a desperate resistance. The one on his left, who appeared to be a groom, brought his heavy whip down on the head and shoulders of the young man as hard and as often as he could do so without running the risk of being tripped up, while a powerful negro in a silver collar held him fast on his right. Passively fronting the group and leaning on his walking cane with his back to Esther, stood a tall graceful figure which she recognised at once as that of Mordaunt. The negro, though going through all the pantomime of strenuous exertion, was perhaps not altogether in earnest; for Francis at one moment succeeded in getting his hand almost to the hilt of his sword. But Mordaunt stepped forward, snatched Francis' rapier out of the scabbard, and with a curse dug the point into the negro's leg, deep enough to make a clean cut in the stocking and cause the blood to flow down into his shoe.

"Hold on, thou damned black dog," he said, "till I bid thee leave go, or thine own back shall smart for't, I warrant thee."

Then he threw Francis' weapon on the ground behind him, and returned again to the passive contemplation of his enemy's chastisement and unavailing struggles. Esther had now pressed very close behind him through the straggling bush, though still sufficiently hidden by a veil of trailing foliage with which it was overgrown to escape notice. She had paused in horror and uncertainty what to do, as, owing to the morning hour and the threatening weather, Tuthill Fields were deserted, and Peterborough House stood so far back behind its walls and trees that she

might have screamed for a long time without attracting the attention of any one there. But when Lord Mordaunt threw away Francis' rapier, it fell at a very little distance from her. Quickly and cautiously Esther took hold of as many of the twigs and trailers before her as she could take at once, so as to pass through them as freely as possible; yet as she sprang through it was with a sound of the cracking of twigs and rending of garments. Fortunately, however, Mordaunt stood too close to her for this noise to warn him in time of her entrance on the scene. Before he could lift a hand to prevent her, she had snatched the fallen rapier from the ground, and rushing on the negro, by the impetus and unexpectedness of her attack caused him to loose his hold of Francis, into whose right hand she immediately thrust his sword. Then was there something like a reversal of fortune in the battle, for Francis, whose quickness of eye and hand made him an excellent swordsman, began to lay about him with such fury that the two servants very soon thought more of escaping unhurt than of obeying orders, and leaping in among the brushwood, disappeared, leaving their master to fight his own battles. If long and successful study of the art of fencing could fit a man to do that, Lord Mordaunt should have been able to do so. He had practised it with real perseverance; but when the bright steel without any button on it began to fly this way and that, he did not do more than draw and make a distant ineffectual thrust or two, shouting angrily to his servants to disarm the rascal. When the groom and the negro had been put to flight, Francis, infuriated, thirsting for revenge and heedless of the consequences, rushed straight upon their master with a deadly look, and Mordaunt felt for the first time the shock of swords crossed in good earnest. Then with the desperate consciousness that his only hope lay in making a cool defence, came the power to make it. That assistance would come before long was more than probable, and meantime, pale as death, with head thrown back and dilated eyes, intent to follow the fierce, varied, lightning-quick attacks with which

his adversary pursued him, he retreated step by step across the little clearing. But just as he had almost touched its extreme limit he gave a low but exceeding bitter cry, his sword sprung to the ground, and as he threw forward his left hand and arm to catch at Francis' weapon and shield his body from the coming thrust, a spurt of blood crimsoned his lace cravatte. His cry was scarcely over when it was echoed by a much louder one from the lips of Esther.

"Oh! don't kill him!" she shrieked, catching Francis' arm. So for a few seconds the three stood motionless together, Mordaunt with his bloody hand still clutching his opponent's blade, and staring at Francis' frowning face with the horror of death fixed on his own. Then quite suddenly the tension of his nerves and muscles relaxed, his head fell back, he staggered a minute and fell heavily backwards among the hazels.

Esther took hold of him as though to lift him out of the bushes.

"O Heavens! Do you think he is dead?" she asked.

Francis wiped his brow with a handkerchief and dropped his sword back into his sheath.

"Not he," he replied, and at first he was so hoarse that he could scarcely speak. "I've spoiled his fine hand for him, that's all. Why the devil must he try that old trick with the left?"

And he proceeded very unceremoniously to drag his fallen foe out by the legs and leave him lying on his back on the sticky earth. Esther looked in horror at the gashed left hand and arm.

"'Twas a mercy you did not kill him," she said.

Francis made a face, with a kind of shudder.

"'Twould have been downright murder. I have killed men, as soldiers must, but to kill such a coward wretch as that would be butcher's work. Yet being so blind with anger I might not have stayed my hand in time, had you not caught it; so you have my thanks, Hess, if not his—and thanks too, Essie, for your coming in the nick—you was always quick-

witted. You couldn't save me a beating, but you have helped me to my revenge for't—and I won't pretend to be so good a Christian as not to value that extremely."

"O Frank, 'twas a shameful, cowardly deed! See, your coat is split, and your forehead terribly marked."

"No matter, Hess. *He'll* not go boast of my bruises," returned he, with a grim smile at the prostrate figure before him.

Esther, kneeling on the ground, began to raise Mordaunt's head and undo his cravatte, but Francis pulled her up impatiently.

"Here's no wound worth naming," he said; "'tis a pretty deep swoon he is in; no more than that. Run now to Peterborough House, and bid his own people come to his assistance, and I will go and find a hackney to take us to St. James', for I believe I am no figure to walk with a lady. Make haste—it begins to rain."

The black cloud overhead was lower than before, and as he spoke there was a tossing and whispering in the tree-tops, and even through the sheltering foliage a heavy drop fell on his upturned face. Esther hurried away to the house, and he, after picking up and giving a knock or two to his hat, which had suffered in the encounter, walked off in the direction of Tuthill Fields.

Now Lord Mordaunt lay there alone; but not really alone. No sooner had Francis and Esther gone their several ways than the black head of Tully the negro appeared, raised cautiously from behind a bush. When he saw his master stretched out on the ground before him, he stole out and stared at the prostrate figure, and some secret fascination drew him nearer and nearer to it. A negro face is apt to seem an inexpressive thing to an unaccustomed eye, but as Tully looked at Lord Mordaunt the growing ferocity of his gaze was unmistakable. He passed his hand up and down his own leg, where Mordaunt had stabbed it. His mind was filling itself with vengeful memories of other blows, of countless curses and degrading words which had fallen to his lot

since Mordaunt owned him. Tully had been kindly brought up in his West Indian home, whence he had been sent as a present to Peterborough's son. His father had been born in the forests of Africa, and a generation of slavery and semi-civilisation had not tamed the fierce blood that he inherited from naked warriors whose sport was the death of their foes. There was a strange look of the wild beast about him as he crouched at Mordaunt's side, peering in his face with low guttural noises and hissing whispers. His eyes rolled and glittered, as, showing his strong clenched teeth in a grin of rage and hate, he seized a fallen sword, which lay on the ground close to his hand; it was his master's weapon, a strong two-edged rapier. Laying his left hand on the young man's thick, brown hair, Tully drew the sharp edge of the blade lightly across his bared throat. At the touch of the cold steel Lord Mordaunt opened his eyes. For an instant those eyes must have looked at the black face hanging over them, threatening, distorted with mingled passions of hate and terror and revenge, and at the green overshadowing boughs beyond it. Then Tully again drew the blade across his throat, this time in savage earnest. Whether the impulse that caused the negro to kill his master originated most in his hate or in his terror at suddenly seeing Mordaunt's eyes open, the deed was done before he could realise the consequences of his act. He remained a minute or two beside the inanimate or almost inanimate body, staring at it in unfeigned horror; his face turned a yellowish colour and his knees knocked together with fear. He did not consider his chances of escaping suspicion; flight was all he thought of. Throwing the blood-stained sword away from him, he felt with trembling fingers in his master's pocket, found his purse, emptied it into his own pouch, then slipped in among the bushes, and vanished again more noiselessly and completely than before. Within ten minutes of the time that Francis and Esther had gone their several ways, Lord Mordaunt was again lying alone. So quickly and silently had all this passed, so little altered the position of the

body, that had there been a hidden spectator of the drama, he would almost have supposed it had been a dream; a vision such as some monkish painter might have imagined, showing the foul, unlovely spirit that had its habitation in that beautiful form, hanging over it like an emanation before it vanished for ever from the earth and departed to its own place.

The first person who came that way was Francis, who had found a hackney coach at no great distance and driven back in it to Tuthill Fields, where it was waiting. He came leisurely along the path, while the rain pattered on the leaves overhead, and every now and then a large slow drop dripped down on to him. When he came to the bush through which Esther had made her way to his assistance, he saw her tracks, the broken twigs and scattered leaves and a bit of torn sleeve-ruffle hanging on a brier.

He smiled, and declared to himself that any other woman in the world would have done nothing under such circumstances except scream and faint. In which partial belief he erred. So looking through the branches, but full of his own thoughts, it was a minute or two before he noticed that Mordaunt was lying where he had left him. It cannot be said that the fact caused him keen anxiety, but he thought his swoon was lasting a long time and wondered no one had yet arrived from the house. When he came round the bush into the clearing he saw what had happened.

Meantime Esther had reached Peterborough House and briefly told Lord Peterborough of the fight and its origin. For a nobleman to employ others to beat a man he chose to consider unworthy of his sword was not so unprecedented a thing that every one would have been equally shocked at it. Lord Peterborough, however, with all his faults, was a brave man, and so cowardly a form of retaliation would never have commended itself to him. Now, when the victim was one to whom he was really attached, his indignation was extreme. But that which roused it most of all was that Mordaunt should swoon like a

girl at the sight of his own blood, and in general show the white feather. He would not send any one else, but determined to come himself and let his son know his opinion of him, while Adriano was dressing his wound. And all the way as he walked beside Esther, followed by Adriano bearing a bandage and other necessaries, he was calling Heaven to witness how horribly undeserved a thing it was that he should have a chicken-hearted poltroon for his son and for heir to his distinguished name.

The path from the garden-gate ran straight to the clearing, so that while yet a little way off it they could see Francis standing by the side of the body, somewhat turned away from them, with his head sunk on his breast and his arms hanging straight by his side. Esther called to him, and looking around with a start he hurried towards them, holding up his hand to warn them from approaching nearer. He was very much agitated, and this in one who so seldom betrayed agitation alarmed Esther.

"Stop, Essie," he said, as he came up to them; "this is no place for you."

Then, turning to Peterborough:

"My Lord, your son—your son is—is——"

"Is dead?" asked Peterborough.

Francis made an affirmative sign.

There was a pause, and even in the shadow of the trees the aging face showed a yellow pallor round the patches of paint that Adriano had so cunningly put on.

"Well," he resumed at last, "I have lost other and better sons. I did not suppose the loss of this one would have touched me so nearly—but my race dies with him. Let us proceed."

"No, my Lord," said Francis, laying his hand on Peterborough's arm; "do not go further, do not look at him—at least not yet."

"Pshaw, boy!" cried Peterborough impatiently, pushing on; "what stuff is this you talk to an old soldier that has seen more dead men than you have seen live ones?"

"I know not how he came by his death; there has

been foul play, but believe me I do not know," said Francis very earnestly, following him.

Lord Peterborough made no answer, for he was not listening. When he came near enough to see for himself the nature of his son's mortal wound, he started visibly, and going up to the body kneeled down by it, though it was plain that nothing could be done. Then turning his head to look at Francis with an awful sternness, and pointing to the wound:

"How's this, young man?" he asked. "This was never done in honourable fight."

"Oh, my Lord," cried Francis; "before Heaven I cannot tell you. I swear to you that I gave him no greater hurt than that cut across the hand. I left him in a swoon, and returning but now, I found him so."

Esther in spite of Francis' prohibition now came up, followed by Adriano. The Italian, who had been in a nobleman's household in his own country before taking service with Lord Peterborough, was used to seeing strange, sometimes frightful things without comment, and stood discreetly aside without any expression of emotion. Esther gave an exclamation of horror and clapped her hands to her eyes. Then, turning to Francis:

"Oh, 'tis too horrible! In God's name, Frank, how could this happen?"

"I know no more than you," he answered, with the kind of impatience that comes from pain of body or mind. His eyes sought the face of Lord Peterborough, who had risen to his feet and was staring gloomily into the bushes straight before him.

"My Lord Peterborough," cried Francis, "do you believe me an assassin? Before Heaven I know no more than the babe unborn how this unhappy man came by his death."

"I cannot tell what to think," returned Peterborough without looking at him; "all men are liars—but if 'twas your hand that did it, then was it a foolish and ungrateful as well as a dishonourable deed."

Francis said nothing but made a gesture of de-

spair strangely passionate for one so self-contained.

"My Lord, my Lord," cried Essie, wringing her hands, "you must believe him; indeed he is no liar and never was one. And I saw with my own eyes how he had Lord Mordaunt at his mercy and could have killed him fairly. He spared him then, in hot blood. Can you think he would slaughter him in cold? If you do not know him better than to think so, I do. Pray, my Lord, listen to him, for he speaks nothing but the truth."

Esther in her excitement had forgotten her horror of the dead man, and had actually fallen on her knees at Lord Peterborough's side and taken hold of him to enforce her plea. He turned his head and looked at Francis, and his face softened.

"I *will* believe you, child," he said gravely; "'twould give me too much pain to do otherwise. No—that deed is not yours, but have you no guess who is the assassin?"

Francis kissed the hand that Lord Peterborough stretched out to him, and mournfully shook his head. He then repeated in greater detail the story that Esther had before told, of the assault on himself and the fight with Lord Mordaunt. When Francis had finished:

"I trust this day's work may not cost me yet another son," said Lord Peterborough. "But it seems but too likely that when the servants yonder luckless boy employed against you find he is dead, they will accuse you. Since the Duke of Hamilton's death the magistrates have been waiting to make an example of some gentleman who has been unlucky enough to kill his adversary, and has not too powerful friends at his back. And, alas! child, with what decency could I publicly protect you in this matter?—Besides, if it be inquired into, we cannot pass it off as a duel, it having happened without witnesses except this lady—especially the wound being as it is."

All this and more had passed through Francis' mind in the short interval that had elapsed between his finding the body and the arrival of Peterborough and Esther.

"If you'll but believe me innocent, my Lord," he replied, "I'll bear the rest. But what had I best do?"

Peterborough thought a minute.

"Go home with Miss Vanhomrigh; my people will have no clue to your whereabouts. If it appears that I cannot hush the matter up, then I will so contrive it that you leave England this night."

Calling Adriano in Italian to bind up and conceal the dead man's wound as much as was practicable, Peterborough drew Francis away in the direction of Tuthill Fields. When they got out into the fields, they found that the rain was finer than when it first began to fall, but thicker and more penetrating. It was not possible to see very far, and there was no one in sight when they reached the hackney coach. Lord Peterborough himself gave the orders to the coachman, lest he should look at Francis too closely, and with a consoling observation to the effect that Adriano could not speak English comprehensibly and could hold his tongue in Italian, he sent Esther and Francis rolling off to St. James' Street.

About half-past eight o'clock in the evening Lord Peterborough arrived there himself, wrapped in a great frieze Joseph and wearing a hat and wig as unlike his usual ones as possible. He was carrying a few necessaries for Francis with his own hands, not choosing to be followed to the house even by Adriano. He told them that of the two servants employed to beat Francis one, a negro slave, had taken the opportunity to run away, and his Lordship thought it more prudent under the circumstances to bear the loss than to advertise for him, especially if Miss Vanhomrigh thought it probable he had recognised her. The groom had stated that he would not know the lady again who had so suddenly interfered in Francis' favour, but was positive he would know the young man himself, and that there was no doubt 'twas he had killed Lord Mordaunt, whether by accident or by intention. A footman, who had been standing under the grand staircase when Mordaunt passed down it from Lord Peterborough's apartments, although he had not heard all that Francis had then

said to Mordaunt, had distinctly caught the words—"I'll kill you if I can," pronounced, as he affirmed, in a very threatening manner. Moreover, in spite of Adriano's careful bandaging, it was rumoured in the household that Mordaunt's death-wound was not such as could possibly have been given in the course of an honourable encounter. It was plain there had been foul play. Lord Peterborough was now sure that Francis must leave England at once and for a long time, if not for ever. He gave him the choice between sailing that night for France, where he might wait for the return of James III., or take service in a foreign army, or getting on board a ship in which Peterborough had a share, which was sailing before morning for the American Plantations. The captain was an old and tried adherent of Peterborough's, and his Lordship had an estate in the American Colonies, or Plantations, as they were still called. There he believed that he could very handsomely provide for Francis, whom he desired to pass under the name of Mordaunt, and himself reap some benefit from his presence there. Yet Lord Peterborough was very loth to part with him. The young man had but a few minutes in which to decide his future, and somewhat to his Lordship's surprise he chose America. For though he was a soldier he was something else besides, and if he could not serve in the English army he would not serve in another. Perhaps a soldier's life had not proved so satisfactory as he had expected, perhaps he had seen something of adventurers serving in foreign armies, and after his critical manner thought meanly both of them and of their career. As to James III., though his loyalty and gratitude to Lord Peterborough made him willing, as he would have said, to act as special messenger to the devil for that nobleman, if so desired, he would have been sorry and surprised to see the return of the injured Monarch. He had been used to keep the festival of the Battle of the Boyne as a schoolboy, and even if he had been disposed to turn Jacobite afterwards, his late visit to St. Germains would have sent him back to the principles of

his youth. But it must be admitted that before deciding, he had asked his Lordship if there was not sometimes soldiering to be done out in the Plantations, and hearing that the Indians and the French were often very troublesome, made up his mind to go there; yet without any eagerness, for he was greatly depressed both at the part he had innocently taken in the death of Lord Peterborough's heir, and at his own sudden and indefinite banishment from England. He would gladly have stayed awhile, not merely for his own sake, but because he perceived from what Essie told him that the Vanhomrigh ladies were socially and pecuniarily in straits, and that if he could not materially help them, his presence would be a comfort and relief to them, especially to her. She had tried to dissuade him from seeing Mrs. Vanhomrigh, declaring that her mother was not well enough to hear the story of his encounter with Mordaunt or its cause, and could not safely be trusted with a secret. But he insisted upon it that he could not be in Cousin Vanhomrigh's house without seeing her, and made her promise with some pride to maintain secrecy on the subject of his visit, because he was in town on a political mission. It perhaps somewhat reconciled him to leaving England to learn that Swift was there, and frequenting the family as usual, though in the country for the moment. Mrs. Vanhomrigh knew fifty good reasons why the Dean had so long postponed formally proposing for the hand of Esther, and could almost fix the exact date when he would do so. Francis, who had heard all this of old, put no particular faith in it, but he knew that if things were still in the same position as before, he would have to content himself with taking a subordinate place in Esther's regard, and suffer again the old repressed hatred of the Doctor—a hatred which was partly jealousy and partly a natural aversion which he would have felt under any circumstances. He had found it distinctly pleasanter to be far away, and too fully interested and occupied to be very sensible of his own loves and hates. Yet for a little while he might have been happy with

them, his oldest, almost his only friends in the world, and serviceable to them, had it not been for his misadventure of that morning.

The three, Peterborough, Esther and Francis, were mostly silent as they walked along the deserted dripping Mall in the dusk of the summer evening in the direction of Westminster stairs. At the top of the stairs was a bench where a number of watermen sat, some dozing, some smoking and some playing cards by the light of a lantern ; villainous-looking men, mostly wearing loose blouses, the skirts of which hung down beneath their waistcoats, no coats, and caps on their unkempt locks. A fare on such an evening was a strange and welcome sight, and there was a commotion among them, some dozen men jumping up at once and shouting, "Oars, sir?"—"Sculls, your honour?"—"Sculls or oars, gentlemen?" Peterborough bespoke a couple of oars, and while a dirty-looking and foul-mouthed waterman was hailing his boat and the comrade who shared it with him, Francis and Esther stood together on the bank.

"It is very hard to lose you thus, Francis," said she. "It was a wonderful comfort to me to see you this morning."

He sighed, and made no answer.

"All this will pass over ; Lord Peterborough is set on hushing it up. Meanwhile, you must write us how you do. I do not love to think you are going to so savage a country."

"I shall return," he replied ; "I will return. You have but to send for me when I can be of service, and I will certainly come. Mordaunt will soon be forgotten and I yet sooner."

"I trust it may be so," she said. "In any case, dear generous cousin, we shall not forget you—nor cease to be sorry that you suffer through us, for it is through us."

"No, Hess ; do not continue to say that," he cried impatiently. "'Tis a mere cursed trick of the jade Fortune. I care not—I will be even with her somehow, and you shall see me return.—That is, if you wish to see me."

"Come, child," Peterborough called out; "the oars are ready. Make your adieux as tenderly as you will, but briefly. I'll not count the kisses."

"My service to Cousin Vanhomrigh and Moll, and I trust they will soon be in health," said Francis, and raised Esther's hand to his lips. She kissed him hastily on the forehead, both gentlemen paused and made their bows to her at the top of the stairs, then by the flickering light of the boatman's lantern she saw Peterborough push Francis into the boat before him, throw money to a man who was holding the boat up to the landing-place with a hook, and sign to him to let go. In less than a minute the dark boat disappeared in the darker shadow of the bridge, its lantern gleamed there for a moment, and was gone. Old Ann had followed the party at a little distance, and now joined Esther, who went home to St. James' Street as quickly as she could, oppressed with a sense of desertion and very melancholy.

CHAPTER XVII.

June and July went by, and still Swift was in Berkshire. Not far from Wantage a bosky cluster of elm-trees fills up a fold of the downs. Passing along the ancient grassy road, called the Ridge Way, you look down on it, and see a church tower and perhaps a red gable or two, and a wreath of blue smoke rising above the heavy summer foliage, sole sign of the village of Letcombe Bassett. In this quiet spot, that hears scarcely any sound except the noise of water and the rushing of the great down winds in the tree-tops, here in the house of a silent eccentric parson of small means, he boarded himself out, and let the busy world go its way. It was not in any spirit of cheerful philosophy that he thus threw aside the tangled skein of his affairs public and private, nor did he consciously go to Nature for consolation. But she, although she could not give him cheerfulness, did unasked deliver him from the storms of bitter anger, the thousand

agitations, the "fever of the soul" that mined his being in London and in Dublin, and bestow upon him a certain calm, as it were the calm of a lowering autumn day. The long internecine struggle between his friends Bolingbroke and the Lord Treasurer, had ended in the overthrow of the latter; and Swift, who had been maddened by his obstinacy and stupidity in the days of his prosperity, stood by him with loyal affection in his disgrace. Now Queen Anne was dead, his own hopes of advancement dead with her, and his friends, as it was rumoured, likely to be accused of high treason. He hardly knew why he lingered; perhaps partly because he shrank from returning to Dublin, partly because he loved, however uselessly, to stand by his friends when they were in trouble. Even had he known how far Bolingbroke and Peterborough and Atterbury had gone in those intrigues with St. Germains which had so little of his sympathy, he could not have borne to forsake them. His own political career was over, and with it he thought all that was worth calling his life.

"Few and evil have been my days," he murmured to himself, and bowed his head on his breast, as he came along the Ridge Way, returning from one of those long rides which were at once a diversion to him and a cure for his bodily ailments. Five-and-thirty years of servitude had been his, forty of comparative obscurity, some three or four of power and fame and strenuous life, when like a swimmer borne shorewards on the summit of a wave, he had rejoiced in his strength and made sure of reaching his goal; but the wave was spent, and again he was engulfed in the trough of the sea, this time as it seemed never to re-emerge. Nor was his ambition or his disappointment all of a petty or personal kind. Faults he had as a politician and as a man; he was imperious and prejudiced in a generation in which his freedom from many prejudices was more remarkable than his slavery to some. But he had strong sense, a far-seeing mind, and above all a public spirit, a love of justice, an inflexible uprightness, almost unique in the petty venal herd which was soon to be priced and

bought by Walpole. He was fitted to serve his country, he had overcome as no man before him had overcome the difficulties of poverty and want of powerful connections, and had sat as an equal at the Councils of Ministers, by that equality doing more to affirm the dignity of the Church than any Bishop in the House of Lords. A turn of the wheel, and not only was his every achievement rendered null and void, but the party on whom he fondly imagined the prosperity of England to depend was not so much deprived of power as annihilated. Over these public misfortunes, over the misfortunes and difficulties of his private life, he brooded ceaselessly, sitting with a book before him in the little wainscoted parlour at Letcombe Bassett or roaming through the lanes and fields. It was his folly, his weakness, his inevitable curse, to be unable to refrain his thoughts from wandering again and again in the same well-trodden weary unprofitable ways. The oftener they returned thither, the greater, the more intolerable appeared the wrongs he had suffered from Nature, from Fortune, from his fellow-men. Nothing but hard galloping on horseback seemed able to shake the brooding demon from his soul, and that but for a little. Happily his friend Mr. Harley had made him a present of a powerful horse, that carried his weight easily. Often in the gathering dusk or when the wild gusts of rain were driving over the open downs, the lonely shepherd standing in the doorway of his wheeled hut, would be startled by the quick, heavy thud of hoofs coming along the Ridge Way, and see a great iron-grey horse pass by at a gallop, sometimes with every sinew stretched to the utmost, foam flying from the bit and blood on the rider's spur. At other times, when the hour was earlier and the day fairer, the grim-looking rider would draw rein and exchange some simple talk with the shepherd about the weather and his flock; on which subject, in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of, his deferentially proffered questions and opinions, the shepherd pronounced him to be a very knowing gentleman, though he could not go so far as to altogether contradict the Letcombe folk, who held

the poor gentleman to be weak in his intellects, and for this reason placed by his friends under the care of Parson Gery. Swift was no enthusiast for Nature; a well-planted orchard and a trim willow-walk gave him more definite pleasure than the wide prospect from the Ridge Way, which probably affected him little more than it had done the Roman legionaries that had passed along it before him. Yet he climbed the steep way thither again and again out of love for the light fresh airs that stream across the downs, the feel and the scent of their fine springy turf, and the freedom of the long galloping ground, rolling itself out interminably before him under the immensity of the sky.

One day early in August, the weather being fine but not hot, for there was a light breeze blowing and fleecy clouds drifting across the sky, he started for his ride earlier than usual, and about four o'clock in the afternoon dismounted from his heated horse in the stable yard of the parsonage.

"Rub him down well, boy," he said to the lad who took charge of him. "Look ye now, boy, as long as I am over you, never call a horse dry till you have rubbed yourself into a sweat over him, nor oblige him with the water pail till he is too cool to be anxious for 't. How you may treat your next master's cattle is none of my concern, but be sure you'll never see the colour of my money, beyond what the law obliges, unless you use my beast handsomely. Methinks the oats were lower in the sack this morning than they should have been. Look to that now as you love my money!"

The lad, who heard pretty much this discourse every day and never knew whether to grin or to be sulky at it, to-day resented the innuendo about the oats.

"Lor' bless your honour, how 'a do talk, and yer honour main simple about beästs and vittles and the loike! I tell 'ee this 'ere harse do eat a power of wuts, that 'a do, and small shame to 'un, poor beäst, says I."

"Well, well, I'll pass it this once; but never think

to deceive me, boy, or you'll find it's yourself that's mightily deceived. I shall find you out, faith, I shall."

And somewhat stimulated and cheered by his ride and his little encounter with the stable-boy, he walked into the house and opened the door of the small wainscoted parlour which was dedicated to his own use. It had a low casement window, on which the oblique rays of the afternoon sun were just beginning to strike, making a certain dimness and dazzle in the room. Through this he distinguished, to his amazement, the figure of a lady in very deep mourning, seated with her back to the light. He paused a moment on the threshold, inwardly cursing the stupidity of the maid-servant, who must have shown some visitor of his host's into his sanctum. But the idea had scarcely time to occur to him before the lady sprang to her feet and threw back her veil.

"Hess!" he cried in incredulity mingled with something like horror. "Good God! Can it be you?"

The trembling anxiety with which she had watched him enter the house grew to trembling fear.

"Don't be angry with me," she pleaded, "I could not help it. 'Twas too tantalising to pass through Wantage and not see you. Didn't you want to see me, Cadenus?"

"Yes—No, I mean. Why could you not send for me if you must be coming to Wantage?"

"I had no time, dear sir," she answered.

"Why the devil should you come by Wantage?" he continued. "Whither are you posting that you come this road rather than by Oxford?"

"To Witney, sir; and besides, sir," she went on, still anxiously excusing herself, "I had a desire to thank you for your kindness in the matter of the money. I dare assure you your signing the bond shall be but a form, yet it helped me mightily with Barber, who without it would I believe have looked very shyly on the loan."

"Oh, I hate to be thanked, miss, more especially for nothing! Pray, where is your discretion? You used to boast that you had abundance. You showed

none in coming hither to set Mrs. Gery tattling."

The passionate annoyance that betrayed itself in his tone, and in the working of his heavy eyebrows, seemed far greater that the occasion warranted. If he had said his whole mind he would have cried: "I want to forget you; I was succeeding in a measure, and here you come and undo my work. I do not know if I love you, but I do know that I hate the tangle you have made in my life."

If she had known the truth, Esther might not have felt so much surprise and indignation at her reception as now overcame her fear, causing her to flash one look upon him, and then throwing her heavy veil once more over her face, walk out of the room and the house without a single word, or so much as seeing Mrs. Gery on the stairs in her best gown and cap. Mrs. Gery, who having but few incidents in her life was obliged to make the most of those that came in her way, had already held a little consultation with the servant on the subject of this mysterious lady, evidently young and fine in spite of her veil and her mourning, who had come to see the Dean and had excused herself from taking a dish of tea in the best parlour. Her rapid disappearance was disappointing, but increased the mystery of her appearance, and Mrs. Gery so plied the Dean with her questions and officious offers of entertainment, that it was some minutes before he could sneak out of the house and down the road after Esther. He followed her at a little distance, not wishing her to return to the parsonage. As she went down the steep hollow lane overarched by trees, she thought she heard the well-known footstep behind her, but would not turn. When she came to the bridge over the long pool formed by the millstreams, she paused a moment and leaned on the parapet, as though to look at a water-lily that was still in bloom, floating over its own reflection in the dark still water, and then she caught a glimpse of Swift following her; but still she continued to walk on up the Letcombe Regis road. Swift came up with her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I ask your pardon, Governor Huff. I meant not to be unkind. I was vexed more for your sake than my own."

"I care not for your reasons," returned she, without looking at him. "Who'd think of 'em in the moment of a *joyful* surprise? No—I was used to have a friend, but now it seems I have only a benefactor."

"Governor Huff will always be chiding because Cadenus is a sober old Doctor that can't forget his reasons. Yet sure that makes him the better friend for a young woman, that is sometimes—O, only sometimes, I allow!—no wiser than others of her sex and age."

"A feeling friend would out of mere compassion have given me a kinder welcome, seeing the many uneasinesses I have to suffer. You do not know all, yet enough to have affected you with pity, had you been capable of it. My poor mamma dying while Moll was yet between life and death, a confusion in our affairs such as 'twould take a better lawyer than I to unravel, such a wretch of a brother as you cannot imagine, and the fear every day to fall alone, two unprotected young women, into the hands of the bailiffs. 'Twas for this reason we fled from London on Sunday, though Moll is most unfit to travel, and mean to lodge with a cousin at Witney till we get some money from my Irish estate. I cannot tell how far I am liable for these debts. Oh, Cadenus, you are indeed heartless to add your displeasure, your most undeserved displeasure, to all my other afflictions!"

"Poor Bratikin!" he said. "How canst thou say I did not pity thee, when I did from my soul, and helped thee so far as in me lay?"

"Yes, I was mad and most ungrateful to say so," she returned, sighing and throwing back her veil once more, as she pressed her hand to her forehead. "Well, 'tis a wonder I am not in Bedlam by this. You do pity me, that's certain; but 'tis not just that I want of you. I want you to feel with me, Cadenus, you that know better than any man alive how to feel with your friends in their misfortunes. But I am

very exacting to expect it, when indeed you do not know half mine, for I was afraid to commit them to the post, for fear all your letters should be read."

"I am truly grieved for 'em before knowing 'em, little Hess. Could you not go to Lewis for counsel?"

"No, sir, not very conveniently. He had some disagreement with my dear mamma, which I do not well understand, but she was mightily huffed with him, for her, who was, as you must be sensible, the best-natured creature that ever breathed. He knew so much of our affairs, too, that I feared he might require to know more, and 'tis the worst of our troubles that some of 'em might be termed disgraces."

Swift's eager sympathies, his friendship and regret for poor "neighbour Van," and the true affection for Esther herself that underlay those other conflicting feelings of his towards her—all combined to break down the barrier between them which he had mentally erected. There was not a soul to be met on the pleasant country road, which ran on accompanied for a time by a babbling stream and broadened by irregular stretches of turf, shaded by great trees. As they walked on, Esther told him bit by bit, with many comments from both sides, the family history of the last two months. He had forbidden any of his friends to send him a newspaper, but he had heard of the mysterious death of Lord Peterborough's son, as to whom it was currently reported that he had been killed in a duel under circumstances in some way discreditable to him. This accounted for the fact that though Lord Peterborough could not prevent an inquest being held upon him, and a verdict of murder being returned against his adversary, he had yet taken no steps to procure evidence or to pursue the murderer, who had somehow immediately disappeared; for which neglect his Lordship was much blamed in certain quarters. This was all that had reached Swift of what had been for a week the talk of the town, and Esther was thankful to find it was so, for it showed there were some persons at least who could mention Mordaunt without mentioning Mrs. Mary Vanhomrigh. She had fancied, as people do fancy who either gossip or

are gossiped about, that "every one" was talking of the story in which she herself was interested.

So in familiar talk that gradually obliterated the traces of their stormy meeting, and of the last two months of separation, they walked on through Letcombe Regis and took the field way to Wantage. In the wide corn-land through which it first passes, the blue-stockinged reapers were cutting the corn and the women were binding it in sheaves. The afternoon sunshine lay on the plain with its golden wealth of harvest, its clusters and lines of heavy foliaged elms, and its red-roofed homesteads; but fleecy clouds were still piled up on the horizon, and shadows were moving in silent procession along the line of the downs. Swift exchanged greetings with the country folk, who all with bob-curtsey or uplifted hat did that reverence to "the quality" which they considered less a matter of courtesy than as a duty enjoined upon them at their baptism.

When they had reached a pleasant meadow, across which a chalk-stream from the downs ran sparkling and clear:

"Let us sit here awhile," said Swift; "I know you love to be romantic, and here's a purling stream and yonder are willows enough. If I was you, when I had rested a bit, I would choose a handsome tree, take out my pocket-knife, and carve in the bark of it an 'F.' and an 'E.,' twined round with a hempen rope tied in a true lovers' knot."

Esther, awaking from a reverie, stared at him.

"What's this you're talking of?" she asked.

"Why, Silly, if you're not in love with this cousin of yours, this slashing swain, this Mordantino, 'tis mighty ungrateful of you."

"I am above answering your banter," returned Esther, tossing her chin and blushing deeply.

"I hope he is really indifferent to you, Hesskin," he continued, "for 'tis very unlikely you'll ever set eyes on him again. Yet 'tis certain he behaved very handsomely—though, when I come to think of it, 'twas for his own skin he was fighting, not yours, and he would without doubt have been forced to take his

beating had you not intervened. Well, well! These are the scurvy tricks that noble lords love to play us commonality, and I wonder not if on thinking the matter over your Mordantino repented him of his generosity and could not forbear letting out the villain's life."

"For shame, Cadenus!" cried Esther. "You never loved poor Frank, but this passes everything. He is incapable of such a deed; and besides he strongly denied it, and I would stake my life upon his word."

"Peace, peace be with us, Missessy. I ask you a thousand pardons. I said it of purpose to provoke you—and must confess that when I hear how hotly you defend your spark, I am no longer surprised that Molly was of the opinion you was in love with him. Faith, she may be more right than either of us, for she's a wise girl in other folk's concerns, is poor Moll. They say, you know, that little misses can't read their own hearts."

There fell an ominous silence; Esther was pulling up blades of grass by the root and tearing them to shreds.

"Cruel! Hateful!" she cried, in a low voice. "O, that I had never read mine, or let you read it! Yet, I must have died else. Died! If any one else could see into my heart, they'd wonder that I live, for you alone make my life insupportable, without considering the thousand other uneasinesses I must suffer. Why should I sit struggling with misfortunes, when not all the wealth of the Indies can promise me satisfaction? Why do I live? I know not, indeed I know not. Sometimes I am resolved to die."

"Hush, hush, Essie!" said Swift, not without agitation. "These are very wild words, and I could better excuse them in Moll, whose misfortunes have been much greater than yours."

"Poor Molly!" returned Esther, gloomily. "'Tis partly for her sake I continue to live. Yet I am not so good a Christian as to find satisfaction in living only for another. I know not how long I shall be able to endure it. Her misfortunes are part of my

own ; but I deny them to be greater than my private griefs."

"'Tis human nature to do that, Essie. There are few things we are so unwilling to admit about others as that their luck has been worse than our own. Yet you cannot pretend to have lost at one blow the better half both of your fortune and your reputation, to say nothing of a lover who has come to a miserable end, though not more miserable than he deserved. You have your health. These troubles consequent upon poor Madam Van's death will pass over with a little management, and you will find yourself the mistress of a good fortune. Believe me, however the romantic may talk, health and wealth form two large parts of happiness, and sincere friendship the rest. As for these other fancies you will still be maundering about, no reasonable being can for an instant regard them."

"I am sick of your Reason and your Reasonable Beings," said she. "Pray, what does it all mean? Were I confined by some spell to this meadow and forbidden to get food from elsewhere, I should protest I starved, and doubtless the sheep would find me mighty ridiculous. Yes, yonder grave old ram would be positive I could not starve among all this good rich grass. You judge me after his manner, Cadenus, when you declare I have everything to make me happy."

"Happy?" repeated Swift, with a sombre look. "Who is happy? Happiness is a word the devil learned in Paradise to mock us with, lest we should find content. I do not say you are happy, foolish child, but I say you have much less reason to be unhappy than Moll ; and I also say that you have not half her philosophy, who appears to have cured herself at once of her infatuation for her spark, when 'twas clear it could cause her nothing but uneasiness."

"Moll again ! You can compare a thing so paltry as her flame for that poor wretch to the inexpressible love I bear—O Heavens ! Why was I born with such feelings as sure no other creature in this dull age is cursed with, and all, all to be squandered on a block —a stone ! 'Twould have been too much to hope

that I should find a being whose heart was as capable of love as my own, yet I need not have chanced on one that knows not the very alphabet of it, and will not and cannot learn. O, I see well enough 'tis Hebrew, 'tis Chinese to you—no need to tell me you have never loved, for could you give the least guess at what you make me suffer, you'd be a monster to inflict it."

Swift was seated on a knoll of grass, and his hands clasped across his raised knees were twisting and playing with his cane. As Esther spoke the blood ebbed from his face, leaving it ashy pale, and when she ended he did not raise his eyes from the point of the cane, which he kept digging into the ground. At length he spoke, but still without looking up.

"D'ye think I don't know what it means to suffer, Hess?"

"Not as I do, Cadenus."

He dropped his forehead on his clasped hands and began a laugh which broke and turned to a long low moaning exclamation. Esther hearing it was seized with terror and remorse. She took him by the arm.

"Oh, sir, pray don't! Cadenus—dearest, I beg and pray your forgiveness a thousand million times. O Heavens, that I should cause you the least uneasiness! Wretch that I am, unworthy of your friendship, how indeed should you love me? 'Tis madness to dream it. Forgive me this once, and I'll try to be content, indeed I'll try not to complain.—Cadenus!"

Swift raised himself from his bowed posture.

"Let us be calm," he said; "both of us if we can. I forgive you, unhappy child, and hope you'll forgive me as freely. Very likely you think you have more to forgive, yet if you knew all, you'd see 'tis not so. We are both the victims of Fate, and 'tis of no avail to struggle. But there's one particular, Hess, of which, seeing your esteem and friendship for me, I warn you, and 'tis this. My constitution—'tis a secret, remember—is unsound. One of these days your upbraidings, if you continue them, will undoubtedly drive me out of—— I mean, bring me to my end."

He spoke so solemnly that the warning could not

be regarded as a mere attempt to frighten his friend into self-restraint. Esther shuddered and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Is it possible, sir, you have any malady that endangers your life? This is horrible."

"Horrible!" cried Swift, with energy. "'Tis hellish!" and he gripped her shoulder. "Look, Missessy, can you keep a secret? Yes, though a woman, I believe you can. You have told me your secret, I'll pay you in your own money and tell you mine—one I never whispered before to any living creature."

He hesitated; then pointing to a great isolated elm, the topmost branches of which stood out lightning-seared and naked above its lower greenery:

"Look at that tree. 'Tis what I shall be, what I'm fast becoming—dead at the top. Think, Hess,—alive, but dead at the top." And he touched his forehead significantly. "There's some woman in a play—trust you to know all about it—raves like the very devil because she must be shut up in a vault with the bones of her ancestors. What's that to knowing yourself condemned to drag your own bones, your own hideous, rotten, contemptible corpse, about the world to be a mock, a scorn, a horror, alike to your friends and to your enemies? And that's the fate I see before me, have seen before me for years, but always getting nearer, till I seem to touch it, to feel it—Hush! Don't let's talk of that any more, it's too frightful and shocking to speak of—and yet 'twill be."

Esther locked her hands tightly together, but otherwise she was calm.

"Dear Cadenus," she said earnestly, "I am very glad you told me of it. 'Tis most horrible, a nightmare fancy; but there's no truth in it. Such false terrors will appear to us in the solitude of our own thoughts, as horrid shapes appear to children in the dark—but there's no substance in 'em. That you of all men living should fear to lose your powers of mind is indeed singular. My opinion of the matter is scarce worth your taking, but I beg of you to confide in Mr. Pope or Dr. Arbuthnot or some other whose judgment

you value. I am confident they would tell you that for the greatest genius, the brightest wit that has adorned this age, to torment himself with the fear that his intellects are failing him, is the most preposterous fancy that ever was engendered by the spleen."

"Ay, Hesskin, ay, that they would," he answered, nodding his head gloomily; "so well have I kept my counsel. But look you, Missessy," and again he gripped her shoulder and positively shook her, "now I've told you my secret, I'll not have you treat it as the megrims of a sick girl, d'ye hear? Do you believe me such a fool as to plague and martyr myself, to refrain from pretty near everything that's sweet in life, and for years and years, the best part of a lifetime, to continue like that, and all for the sake of a fancy? By Heavens, then, you shall hear the whole truth, you shall see to the bottom of the matter, since your damned female curiosity drives you to it! Yes, I fear I shall end a madman.—Why?—Why? Because I am a madman already."

His hand dropped from Esther's shoulder on to the grass. The throbbing of her pulses visibly stirred the heavy crape kerchief that covered her throat and bosom; she did not look at him at once, but bit her under-lip and knit her brow as she stared at the grass, and Swift, who usually sharply rebuked this and any other facial trick, took no notice of it. Then regarding him steadily and severely:

"I suppose, sir," she said, "you'll be angry if I tell you you certainly talk like one. Compose yourself, I beg, and tell me what just cause you have for thinking yourself—you that's reason personified—to have lost your reason."

Swift's gaze fell before hers; the set muscles of his frowning face relaxed, he seemed to calm himself by a mighty effort, and when he spoke again it was in his usual tone.

"'Except I thrust my hand into the wounds'—Eh? O Didymus, Didymus!—I will then describe to you the cause and effect of my malady, as exactly as though you were a physician much wiser than any that ever yet was calved. For look you—but don't

tell it to my good Arbuthnot, Hess—with their Galen and their Pharmacopœia, and their palatial wigs, these poor fellows smother up the little light of reason that Nature gave 'em. A bumpkin squire that asks the pedigree of a horse or hound before he buys it hath a better empiric judgment of things than they. I've fooled the doctor and myself so long with that tale of the surfeit of fruit I ate when I was young, and how since then I have been subject to this vomiting and giddiness in the head, that I hardly know what is the truth of the matter. But this I know,—my father's brother in Dublin, him that used me so ill when I was a lad, was subject to this same affection, and he was drivelling, raving mad for years before he died. Ay, ay, haven't I seen the crazy old villain scrambling about his fine house, and beating the furniture for rage? And I used to laugh at the poor old wretch, Hess. Besides, my mother's family was said to have this curse on it; that one in every generation must drop down dead or lose his senses. Well, well! This kind of estate will not keep itself in the male line. My mother's brother killed in a fit of madness a wife he valued more than most men value theirs. Consider, Hess—to pass through a hell like that, and when you'd struggled back into the world, and lay there all faint and torn by the devils that had left you, and when you missed the woman that should have been watching at your bedside—think of it, Hess."

"Most sad and terrible, sir, yet not your case. And to consider the matter so nearly and your own chances of being in such a case, is to invite the madness which you fear—and of which up to this present, you show not the least threatening sign, but very much the contrary."

"Ah, Hess, there's where you err." And he lowered his voice. "You know I never see any creature but Patrick when my head's bad. This is why I keep Patrick, though he's the greatest slut that wears breeches. He's very stupid and very good-natured, and he'll not observe or resent anything I may do; and moreover should be talk on't, he's so notorious a liar that even his fellow-footmen won't trouble to

report what he tells 'em. But the truth is I am always strangely dull and cross after these bouts with my head, and sometimes, Missessy, sometimes —well, the words won't come. I know well enough what I want, but I can't find 'em, or I find 'em wrong. And if any one asks me the least question, as, Where is my watch? or, What is the name of my doctor? 'tis not merely that I cannot answer him, but I could kill him for anger at being asked. Yes, the least trifling word or touch may prove sufficient to transport me with rage, and though I thank the Almighty I have never yet lost control over my words or actions, He only knows when and what the end of the matter may be."

"Dear sir, she said," rather tremulously, and placing her hand on his, which lay on the grass, "He certainly sent you a mercy in disguise when he removed you from public affairs."

"No, Hess!" cried Swift with animation. "There's nothing invigorates the mind like affairs of state. My cursed luck has lain in this, that I have had to act with men that had neither common-sense nor resolution. And yet you are right, for who can deal with public affairs except through public men? And are not these altogether vanity?" He sighed dejectedly and said after a pause: "You'll despise me now, Missessy, you'll sneer when I talk of reason."

Esther half rose, and it happened that in doing so she kneeled.

"I? I, Cadenus?" she asked with clasped hands: "Dear, honoured—" and she raised to him the dewy brightness of her eyes and the smile of her mouth, pathetic, triumphant.

Swift looked at her kneeling so before him with a deep melancholy, through which an underlying tenderness was more perceptible than he guessed. His character was essentially secretive, and everything in his life had tended to strengthen its natural bent. Doubtless there would be subsequent moments when he would bitterly regret having entrusted his secret to any one, but just at this moment he felt only a sense of absolute rest, of relief from a long strain,

Humiliation there was none in having confessed his weakness to one whose devotion to him was inalterable, but on the contrary some indirect gratification to his self-esteem. For it is only the dull who think it more flattering to be loved for what they are fancied to be than for what they really are. The charm, the fascination of that great love which had so strangely invaded his life, came over him more strongly than ever before, and more definitely than ever before, he paused to listen to the voice of the enchantress Might-have-been, whose habitation is not far from that of Giant Despair.

"Essie," he said, "do not think me insensible to your—your great affection. Oh, what a brute beast should I be, were it so! There are moments when I would give much to be young again, and able to forget reason and duty. They are hard masters, Hesskin, that give us nothing for our service but the need to serve 'em. Had I met such a one as you twenty years since—well, I might have been madder and more miserable and happier too, and pleaded my youth as an excuse for the wretchedness I had caused to myself and others. But now—though I should curse the hour that ever I laid on my neck the yoke of this Reason and this Duty,—which yet I am bold to say are of a nobler sort than your common church-mouse wots of—now I could not be free of it, I could not endure to kick against the pricks."

Esther, who was seated lower on the bank than himself, was now resting her elbows on the grass and leaning her head on her clasped hands in such a way that he could not see her face; only a black veil and an aureole of hair, golden in the sun.

"Cadenus," she said in a low submissive voice, "tell me—I only wish to understand. Why did reason and duty forbid you to marry, which is, I suppose, what you mean?"

"There, Hess," he returned somewhat sharply, "there you are—the voice of the world, that thinks there's no case of conscience outside the Articles and the Ten Commandments. I tell you I was poor, sick, ambitious, ill-tempered and *mad;* and I am now

a little less poor, much less ambitious, but sick, ill-tempered, and a great deal more mad, besides being old. Had I married I should now be in Bedlam, and my wife a beggar as my own mother was, and my children a pack of miserable beggars such as I was, and with the same curse on them. I know not whether the folly or the crime of it would have been greater."

"But, sir," she resumed more pleadingly, "'twould sure be much better for you to have a woman to tend you when you were sick, than a rough footman, whom you yourself say is dull."

"A woman, Hess? What woman? A wife, d'ye mean, to pry and gaze upon me, and go whisper of the poor Doctor and his fits with the dear goodies her neighbours? You think she wouldn't? I tell you this, Missessy, I know of no woman of sense or spirit who'd bear to be used as I use Patrick at times, without resentment; 'twould not be in human nature that she should. She'd grow to detest and to despise her husband, and she'd always be watching him, to see if the fit was coming on. I promise you when we had a difference of opinion, she'd remember my wits were not always as clear as they should be. Why, the very thought of it would be enough to drive me stark staring mad."

There was silence, and then he resumed in a very gentle voice, that markedly contrasted with the sharpness of his preceding tone:

"I confess, Essie, that you dealt with me, you tamed me better than I could have thought possible, the only time you ever saw me in my sickness. Yet 'twas but a touch of it, a threatening, that day—you know when I mean, don't you?—in Bury Street, on your cousin's wedding-day. I'm glad 'twas no worse. I could not have borne you to see me worse. You'd hate and despise me if you did. Yet, little Hesskin, I have often thought of it since when I've had a bad fit, and been fool enough to fancy you'd have tended me when I was roaring with pain more cleverly than Patrick, and set me down too when I got angry—just made me remember myself, and keep quiet. I

never thought a woman could have set me down when I needed it as you do, Essie, and I not resent it."

The cup of Esther's emotion was already brimming, and at this acknowledgment it overflowed. In another moment she was fallen across his feet, clinging to them, crushing her soft arms and bosom and fine crape against them, not indeed shedding tears, but sobbing passionately between her almost inaudible words.

"Then why mayn't I serve you? I only want to serve you. You say I do it better than Patrick, and yet you won't let me. Why? I see no reason. It would be kinder to let me come, and if you killed me —if you should kill some one, it had better be me, for I should not care—it would not hurt me half so much as your killing, killing words and your sending me away. How can you dream that anything on earth could alter you to me—make you one whit less loved, less honoured? You've cut me to the soul in telling me of your affliction, and you ought to let me share it. I have a right to share it."

Swift drew her gently up till she was kneeling again, but this time nearer to him, and as he laid his hand on her two clasped hands, her eyes were but little below his own. It was a long, a deeply agitated and melancholy look, that he allowed himself into those pleading eyes. It was all that, and more. Esther's violent sobs had ceased, though her lips still trembled.

"Impossible," he said at length.

There was one obstacle to the accomplishment of Esther's desires which he did not mention, and which might not have seemed to every one, as it did to him, the most insuperable.

Those other obstacles between him and marriage he had always before found enough, yet now it is possible that they might have been swept away by the onrush of a stronger tide than any they had yet had to resist, had it not been for this hidden barrier.

That was firmly fixed in his mind, and moreover could he have brought himself to discover it to Essie, she also would have recognised its inflexible nature.

The tender blameless ties which had bound him for so many years to Esther Johnson did not imply marriage with her, but they forbade marriage with another. He was too upright to plead before the tribunal of his consience the absence of any agreement between them, yet he could not bring himself to allow her claims to another, to acknowledge in so many words that he was not a free man. It was only since his relations to Esther Vanhomrigh had become disquieting, that he had put these claims before himself, and it was against his nature, his feeling at the moment, and all the traditions of his life to explain them to Essie. He pretended to himself that the secret was Esther Johnson's more than his own, and therefore he could not honourably divulge it to any one, least of all to another woman, who would no doubt take a conventional view of the matter, and refuse to regard him as bound by ties so singular and so informal. Probably she would make imputations on Mrs. Johnson's character, if she knew that Pdfr. shared his income with Ppt. ; and without telling that, the whole of his obligations in the matter would not be clear. It was not now that these thoughts came into his mind in any sequence ; he had had but too much occasion for them before, and the sum of them was already there, both for good and for evil.

"Impossible," he said ; loyal with all the strength of his will and his judgment to Esther Johnson, and a long past that was his own and hers, even while his arm was round that other Esther, who had grown too dear to him, and whose face was lifted to his so child-like soft and fair, so beautifully transparent in the light of a passion that was as innocent as it was measureless. The colour which had returned to Esther's cheek beneath that long look, ebbed again. She withdrew her hands and sat down a little way off him.

"If you do not love me," she said, "why do you tell me your secrets?"

"Good God, Essie!" cried Swift, and took his hat off his head and dashed it on to the ground ; "what in Heaven's name can I say to you?"

Then he edged up nearer to her, and laying his hand once more on her two clasped ones :

"Hess," he said solemnly, "you are dearer to me than any living creature ; you are of all women her whom I most esteem and adore. For God's sake be content with this, and cease to torture one that loves you but too sincerely. My resolution is taken, and has been taken for as many years as you have been in this most unhappy world. Either we part for ever here and now, or you pledge me your word—I know 'tis sacred—that you will, without further questioning of my reasons, accept my inalterable determination. If in poetry Cadenus has spoken less plainly, has appeared to vacillate in this matter, why, Vanessa knows better than any one that poets play strange tricks with the truth, even when they pretend to tell it. The Dean says plainly to his dear, dearest friend, that her lover he has not been, nor will be ; her husband he cannot, nor ever can be ; her friend he has been, is, and will be to the end of his miserable days. Do you promise, Missessy ?"

Esther was silent a little ; then in a low deliberate voice :

"I cannot promise to be content," she answered.

Swift rose to his feet. He dared not look down at Esther ; he looked through the tall hedgerow elms away to the downs.

"Then farewell, child, farewell !" he said hastily ; "and God bless you !" Esther seized his coat.

"Stop !" she cried, she too springing to her feet, "I did not mean that. Wait till I tell you what I mean. I wish to say that I do not see how any mortal can promise what they will feel or think. Alas ! Who would invite their own thoughts and feelings, could they foresee them ?"

"Who, indeed !" groaned Swift.

"And I cannot promise not to reproach you, should you behave ill to me, for I could not avoid doing so."

Swift smiled a grim, melancholy smile.

"No, Governor Huff, on my conscience I do not believe you could. You speak the truth as usual, Missessy, and having been so honest as to tell me

what you cannot promise, pray now tell me if there is anything you can?"

Esther paused, and then spoke with her eyes on the ground.

"I promise to restrain my feelings as much as lies in my power, and I also promise never again to—to——" she hesitated, then looking him in the face she continued in a clear, steady voice, "never to attempt by word or deed to make you alter your determination."

"Well said! Well said, child!" he cried. "I applaud your resolution. Believe me, by restraining an inclination we get completely the better of it in time." And smiling somewhat ironically—"I once loved figs, you know, and now can see 'em without the least desire to taste 'em."

"Have you promised me anything in return?" asked Esther gravely, without noticing this philosophical reflection, which its author had perhaps addressed more to himself than to her."

"Yes," he returned as gravely; "give me your hand." She did so. "I promise you, Essie," he said, "a most tender and devoted and constant friendship from this day to the day of my death, which I pray the Almighty may not be a very great way off. Amen."

He held her hand a moment longer. Then:

"Let us go on," he said. "Moll will be expecting us."

The silence which followed as they walked side by side in the direction of Wantage was instinct with calm happiness to Esther. Whatever she might feel in the future about the compact into which they had entered, and the manner in which Swift fulfilled his part of it, just now it seemed very sweet and sacred. For Swift that silence was full of inward debate.

"I have surely sacrificed this poor child and my own inclinations sufficiently," he protested to himself. "A man is not bound to be the friend of one woman only, as he is bound to be the husband of one wife only," And yet a voice went on repeating with a

monotonous cuckoo-cry: "Pdfr. does not love Ppt. Poor Ppt.!" And all love and all affection, and the very bond into which he had just entered, seemed to him dust and ashes, mocked as they were by this *memento mori,* this ghost of sweet things dead.

They walked thus in silence for awhile, and then Swift began once more to discuss the tangled business affairs of the Vanhomrigh family. Ginckel was still in Paris, alleging fifty reasons why his successful courtship of the rich widow could not be brought to a crisis. Meantime he was indignant at his appropriation of Molly's money being called anything but a loan, to which he had a right.

"Why do you not apply to Cousin Purvis?" asked Swift.

"The poor lady has had a stroke of the palsy, and has lost her senses for the present," replied Esther. "Besides, our poor mamma applied to her so often that I believe I should have been ashamed to."

"And Ford? How did Ford behave?" asked he. Esther shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, like other people—shabbily."

"I am sorry to hear it," returned he. "Before I left town I thought him sincerely attached to Mollkin."

"He left a formal condolence at the door. 'Tis all we have heard of him these two months."

"Shabby, very shabby," repeated Swift. "Yet I think myself exceedingly foolish in continuing to be surprised at the baseness of mankind."

"To do him justice, I do not think 'twas the ill report of our money matters kept him away. But I wish there were some sumptuary law, whereby the common mob of sentiments should be forbid to wear names that are too fine for 'em. No matter. We have had the pleasure of proving that we possess two or three friends; and those that never knew misfortune or calumny cannot swear to so many."

"Very justly said, miss! Ah! 'Tis an ill world." Esther smiled.

"I thought it so, sir, some hours back, but find it now wonderfully changed for the better."

When they had arrived at the Bear Inn, had passed

up the stairs, and stood at the Miss Vanhomrighs' parlour door, Esther paused.

"Pray do not remark on Molly's sick looks," she said anxiously.

"Hath she never a jest left in her composition?" asked Swift.

"Some folks can jest on the rack," returned Esther. "But I doubt their jests are but a more courageous kind of groan, and they give me no pleasure to hear."

When they opened the door the first thing they saw was a crooked little gentleman huddled up in the corner of a large chair. He rose as they entered, and advancing upon the Dean with open arms, embraced him as heartily as their respective heights allowed.

"Pope!" cried Swift, half pleased, half vexed. "You here! I never thought to see you till Friday."

Then he turned to Molly, and with difficulty repressed an expression of pain and surprise, so terribly changed and thin did she look in her heavy mourning.

Mr. Pope, who was staying at Stanton Harcourt, was to spend two days with Swift at Letcombe Bassett, and the chaise was being got ready; so very soon the two gentlemen took their leave. Essie stood at the foot of the stairs, looking out into the inn-yard to see them depart. They had made their adieux, and Mr. Pope was already in the chaise, when Swift came up to her again, hat in hand.

"Good-bye, Hess," he said. "'Tis very uncertain when we shall meet again but I will write to you when the occasion offers. I go to Ireland shortly. When do you return to London?"

"I do not know," replied Esther hesitatingly. "Seeing how our affairs stand there and in Dublin, 'tis more likely we also shall go to Ireland."

He stood silent; then clapping his hat on his head:

"You should not for the world have come here," he cried. "No, indeed you should not!"

CHAPTER I.

"WELL, Dr. Winter? When may I wish you joy?"

"Never, I fear, Mrs. Conolly, unless you can find me some ally more powerful than my own merits."

"Pooh, Doctor! I believe you do not press the lady sufficiently."

"I own, madam, I see little satisfaction or diplomacy in forcing her to the point-blank 'No.'"

"Faint heart never won fair lady, sir."

The speakers stood in the lane just outside the Miss Vanhomrighs' house at Cellbridge, in the county of Dublin. One a Roman matron in the hood and kerchief of a Georgian lady, the other a divine not much past thirty with an intelligent face and the air of a gentleman.

"'Tis the fair lady's purse, not herself, makes my heart faint," said the young man. "Besides, the very sincerity of my attachment, which has been long a-growing, will not allow me to talk of flames and ardours, like a young fellow who has fallen in love with a mask at a ball. Could I but persuade some friend who has influence with Miss Vanhomrigh to tell her how much I am above sordid motives, how much less cold are my feelings than they appear —Madam, will you not be my friend?"

Mrs. Conolly paused before she answered.

"Dear Dr. Winter, you will smile if I say I dare not, yet 'tis the truth. You know how greatly I have this match at heart, and how truly I esteem and like Miss Vanhomrigh; yet I feel there's a certain point in our intimacy which I reached three or four years since and beyond which I cannot get. There's, as it were, a locked door in the way; I have not the key

to it, and fear should I force it on your behalf, the consequences would be more unhappy to you than to me."

"Madam," returned Dr. Winter, "I must bow to your decision. There's but one other friend Miss Vanhomrigh and I have in common, who may be able to do me this service. I mean the Dean of St. Patrick's."

Mrs. Conolly looked at the young man with a somewhat comical expression, which however he was too absorbed in his own reflections to observe.

"I believe there is nothing would advantage you so greatly, sir, if you could persuade him to undertake as much for you. Yet I own I should tremble —I will not often confess to fearing the Dean, who ought not to be flattered by a too visible awe—yet, between ourselves, I should tremble——"

Dr. Winter smiled superior.

"Oh, madam, I am not one of those that are frightened of the Dean. I have never truckled to him nor had occasion to complain of disrespect from him; quite the contrary. I have ever found him the most considerate as he is the wittiest and most agreeable of companions. There's no man living I admire so much as the Dean of St. Patrick's."

"Then you are all in the fashion," returned Mrs. Conolly. "I remember well when he came back to Dublin seven or eight years ago—or whenever it was that the late Queen died—I was resolved to like him because 'twas the fashion to do quite the contrary. Why, he could not take his ride on the strand but he must be hustled by unmannerly fellows of quality, and 'twas reckoned the best breeding in the world for his old acquaintances to stare at him as though he were newly arrived from China if he ventured to address 'em in the street."

"Madam, you amaze me," cried Dr. Winter with warmth. "I have heard something of the kind before, yet I never cease to be amazed at it. I am glad I was absent from Dublin at the time, as their treatment of this great man would have filled me with an incurable disgust to its inhabitants."

"Matters are now so much altered for the better," continued Mrs. Conolly, "that I'll confess to you I myself have never been able to determine whether he is charming or odious."

Dr. Winter exclaimed.

"I cannot hinder it, Doctor. Say I go to bed o' Monday at rest in the conviction that I cannot suffer him, I am certain to meet him before Sunday and be forced to adore him. It must be owned that, whatever his faults, he is the least wearisome of mortals."

"He hath as much variety in his talents and disposition as four commoner men put together," cried the enthusiastic young divine, "and 'tis greatly to be wished that Providence could grant him four times the usual length of life, for in the short space of three-score years and ten 'tis impossible that he should do justice to all his qualities."

Mrs. Conolly tapped him with her fan and laughed.

"My stars, Doctor, you alarm me! I believe you and some other fiery young fellows will be proclaiming Jonathan King of Ireland, and down with King George, presently. I'll bid you farewell before I must hear treason. Farewell, and good luck to your wooing."

She reached him her hand, which he kissed gallantly, and the two went their respective ways: Dr. Winter to the inn where his horse was stabled, Mrs. Conolly to a door in the high wall which admitted her to the Miss Vanhomrighs' domain.

She entered the house unannounced, a privileged guest, and finding no one in the book-room where they commonly sat, proceeded to the dining-parlour. Miss Anna Stone stood there, bent double over a table and absorbed in composing some garment from sundry fragments of tawdry silk picked up at an auction in Dublin. Mr. Stone had lately been a loser in one of the bubble companies of the day; for the commercial spirit which was making the British Empire while politicians strutted on their petty stage was already a tricksy as well as a powerful sprite. Mr. Stone had consequently given up his London house and was waiting for a country living that must shortly

be vacant. Meantime, Miss Stone was homeless, for her sister was one of those not uncommon people who conceive marriage to imply a complete absolution from the duties of kinship and friendship; so Anna bethought herself of her cousins in Ireland. There were several families of these, but somehow wherever else she was invited she always drifted back to Cellbridge again before long.

She returned Mrs. Conolly's greeting hurriedly, as one interrupted in an absorbing occupation.

"You will find my cousins in the garden-parlour, madam," she said, speaking with one side of her mouth only, because she held a pin in the other, and pointing with a large pair of scissors to a door on the opposite side of the room to that on which Mrs. Conolly had entered.

"Pray tell me, miss," asked Mrs. Conolly gravely, "how does Miss Molly do? Do you see a great change in her since you was last here?"

Miss Stone, who had now accumulated three pins in her mouth and was contemplating her work with her head on one side, took them out severally and inserted them to her satisfaction before she answered.

"Change, madam? Lord, yes. I thank God I an not as blind as a bat; I was never like some folks, lacking in observation. You'll excuse me, I beg, madam, for continuing my work. We that have lost our fortunes cannot afford fine manners."

"I beg you'll be easy and not inconvenience yourself, madam," returned Mrs. Conolly. "Do you think our excellent Miss Molly very sick?"

"Oh, she's not long for this world!" returned Miss Stone, cutting basting-threads and whisking them out through the crackling silk. "I could see *that* as soon as I was back; I've a wonderful quick eye for illness. I should say she'd not last longer than—than old New Year's Day or thereabouts, and 'tis strange how seldom I am wrong in my forecasts. Some are too hopeful and some too apt to give folks up, but over and over again it has happened that sick persons have taken the turn for the better or

died on the very days I have prophesied it of 'em. Yes, sure, Cousin is very sadly, for if you'll believe it she'll not endure so much noise as the pulling out of a thread in her neighbourhood, or I would be glad to keep her company while I worked. But I know not how to be idle. I am one of those that must always be doing."

"Does Miss Vanhomrigh think so ill of her sister's health?" asked Mrs. Conolly.

Miss Stone shrugged her shoulders.

"Cousin Vanhomrigh's a strange girl—strange woman, I should say, as you must very well know, madam. She talks as though her sister was as like to live as you or I. 'When Moll is better we shall do this and that,' says she. For my part I call it downright heathenish not to prepare for death; but I've done my duty in calling her attention to her sister's state and can do no more. Last night when Cousin Mary was dozing there was a winding-sheet on the candle just over against her; so I pointed it out to Cousin Vanhomrigh, and I assure you she was most uncivil. 'Tis not every one could live friendly in this house, but 'tis ever *my* device to bear and forbear."

Mrs. Conolly, who saw she had learned as much from Miss Stone as she was likely to learn, passed into the garden-parlour. This was a small room with a glass door opening on to a stone terrace. The door was shut and Molly's couch was drawn up near the fire. Her eyes were closed, and in that state of repose the worn and deathly aspect of her face was startlingly visible, whereas when she spoke or smiled it was disguised by the animation of her look. Her sister sat on a low stool before the hearth, with her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand. A book lay open before her, but she was staring into the fire. A dish of oranges and a coffee-pot stood on a table near. Both young women were absorbed in their own thoughts and did not hear Mrs. Conolly, as she opened the door and came softly round the screen that half enclosed them. She paused; perhaps even she, robust as she was in mind and body,

was momentarily affected by something ominous and melancholy in the silence that brooded over this pair of sisters. Molly perceived her before she spoke, and sat up to greet her with outstretched hands and the charming smile that, together with her bright eyes, was all that now remained of the gay loveliness of her early youth. Esther too rose and greeted her courteously, but with a listlessness that looked like coldness.

"I trust this change of weather hath got the better of Miss Molly's cough," said Mrs. Conolly, holding Molly's hand and looking at her sister.

"Of course it has, madam," returned Esther hastily, almost sharply. "I knew she would be sadly, so long as that bitter north-east wind blew; there's very few that do not feel the ill effects of it. She's a world easier now 'tis gone, and begins to think of growing strong and hearty before the summer."

Molly put her hands up to her ears, and in doing so threw back her sleeve-ruffles, showing arms no larger than a child's.

"Pray now, ladies, pinch me when you have done talking of me," she cried with a pout, "or when you have found something diverting to say about me. But that's impossible. I've not even a new ailment, and my own grandmother, were she alive, would be tired of talking of my old ones before now. O that I should be condemned thus early to prove the most insipid theme for my neighbours' discourses of any woman in Dublin that's under eighty! But 'tis even so. Tell me, Mrs. Conolly, when will your new house be ready for dancing in? I hear 'tis a vast deal finer than the Castle."

So they began to talk of the palace Mr. Conolly was building for himself at the other end of the village, Molly out of breath but not out of spirits, and Esther, with her grave, pre-occupied air, talking with more determination than interest, to save her sister's voice. But the other thoughts that had been in her mind as she sat and stared at the fire were there still. After a time Mrs. Conolly found a con-

venient opportunity for speaking of Doctor Winter, whose taste she said she was consulting in the planting of her garden and grounds.

"I believe he has helped you in designing your beech-grove, Miss Vanhomrigh," she continued, "and a mighty pleasant one it will be when all of us are dead and buried. Pray now consult him about the planting of your laurels."

"O madam," cried Esther, tossing her chin defiantly, "I love my laurels, and I love to plant 'em with my own hands just when and where I please."

"I hope, miss, you are not cruel to Doctor Winter. He is a very ingenious and learned young gentleman, and besides extremely well-bred. I think you should be proud to be highly esteemed by him."

"We are proud," murmured Molly. "I, in particular, madam, am exceedingly proud of Doctor Winter's attentions."

"Molly!" cried Esther, and blushed; then continued—"Indeed, madam, we are proud of Doctor Winter's friendship, but 'tis not at all of the nature you perhaps suppose, or that mischievous brat there would make you suppose. When we first knew him, he was very desirous to be presented to the Dean of St. Patrick's, and we did him that service, for which he hath ever been grateful. He appears to me to have shown a very superior understanding in conceiving so great an opinion of the Dean, at a time when the world was using him even more scurvily than is its custom. Doctor Winter shows himself above the common herd by adoring genius, which 'tis well known they detest. That alone would make us esteem him, and while Moll has been so very sick, he has been in a manner domestic here, reading and talking to her both pleasantly and comfortingly. For without being an enthusiast, madam, he is a truly pious man."

"You perceive now, madam," said Molly, "the reason of my sickness lasting such an intolerably long time. 'Tis as plain as a pikestaff."

Mrs. Conofly, thinking she had done all she could for Dr. Winter, turned the conversation to other sub-

jects, and presently went home in the falling twilight.

There was silence again when she had left; Molly lying back exhausted and Esther pacing the room restlessly, her erect figure darkening more and more as it passed between Molly and the light, till it was merely a silhouette against the outer twilight, except when a red tongue of flame leapt up from the logs on the hearth.

At length, clasping her hands behind her head, she began to speak in her low rich voice, sometimes raised in indignant protest, sometimes broken by despair.

"This is the seventh day, Molkin. How many more am I to wear away in vain expectation, waiting for one that loved us once, and now thinks not, cares not whether you or I be dead or living? I told him I would not be so unreasonable as to expect him to a day, but seven days!—O, I believe I could better have endured to have passed them on the rack than as I have done; sighing for the night that suspense might be over, and all night sighing for the morning that I might be able to expect him again. Yet when he comes I shall not dare to chide. Once I should have dared; I used to chide him for all his faults. Has he grown more awful, think you, Moll, since then? Or I a very abject? I can write and upbraid him—I will do so at once—but at the hour when he should receive my letter I am shivering at the thought of his frown."

"Essie," said Moll, shading her eyes with her hand, "consider that person in the next room."

Esther, who happened to be near the door of communication, opened and shut it again abruptly.

"Anna has gone, she and her mantua."

"Thank God, and would 'twere further!" ejaculated Molly, and Esther resumed her pacing.

"Ten weeks!" she broke out again. "Ten weeks since I saw the only valuable creature the world contains for me, excepting yourself. Ten weeks, and in all that time but one letter and one note. Tell me, Moll, what means this strange, this pro-

digious neglect of—of her he once—O Moll, for pity's sake tell me what can it mean?"

"Come hither, my dearest Hess," said Molly, "come close. I cannot speak so loud."

Esther threw herself on her knees by Molly's long chair. Molly took hold of her sister with her little thin, transparent hands, and looked at her with a long gaze of infinite pain and compassion, such as a mother might have bestowed upon a child. When she began to speak it was firmly, though she shivered with physical weakness and nervous anxiety as to the effect of what she had to say.

"There is something I have long wished to say to you, Essie, but did I not sometimes think I have not much more time in which to be talking, I should go on fearing to say it. If 'tis too cruel, will you promise to forgive me before I die, even though that should be to-morrow?"

"Hush, Moll—you *will* die if you give yourself up. I shall die first."

Indeed she looked very ill. Molly smiled a little. "You will need to hasten, if you would trip up *my* heels, Hess. Do you promise what I asked?"

"I cannot bear you to give way to such thoughts, but I promise a thousand times over."

"You ask me if I can guess the meaning of the Dean's neglect of you," continued Molly. "If you intended me to invent a plausible excuse for it, I have no longer wit to do't. But, O Essie, my dear, I have long ago thought of a good reason for his behaviour, and so I believe have you."

"What do you mean?" asked Esther faintly.

"Have you never mentioned Mrs. Johnson to him, Hess?"

Essie was silent a minute and then answered with a certain stubbornness of manner:

"Five or six years since in Dublin I spoke to him of Mrs. Johnson, being weary of listening to the chatter of the disagreeable prying people 'twas our misfortune to be thrown amongst, without knowing the truth of the matter. He—he was terribly angry at my having heard all this tattle and mentioning it

to him. He said he would explain to me once and for all Mrs. Johnson's claims on him; how that she had been his ward in all but the lawyer's sense, ever since she was a child, and had the claim of a ward and almost a younger sister upon him. He said she was very elegant and accomplished and accustomed to be treated like a lady by persons of quality, but that her family were but servants in the household of the Temples, and therefore he had thought it possible to extend to her an honourable protection, such as should keep her in the sphere of life to which Sir William had accustomed her, without its being thought he would marry her. Which he repeatedly assured me he had never proposed to do. 'Tis well known there's an elderly woman lives with her, and he assures me he never visits her except when she is in the company of this Mrs. Dingley out of regard to her reputation and because he is accustomed to the society of both. This is all about Mrs. Johnson."

"If this be all, for what possible reason did he keep the very existence of one so intimately connected with him a secret from us, to whom he was wont to talk openly enough of his other friends? And, pray, Essie, why has he never introduced to us, to us who delight to honour those he loves, this lady whom he treats as a sister?"

"You might know him well enough by this time Moll, to give up demanding reasons for his whimsical secrecies. Enough that he hates to talk of his private affairs. And Mrs. Johnson is not, as you must be aware, received by the better families in Dublin, that is, where there are ladies."

"And what is the cause of that?" asked Molly with some indignation. "Her low birth, you would say, but I tell you there's yet another, and that is the Dean himself. 'Tis he has caused the world to look on her askance."

"You accuse him then of a base intrigue!" cried Essie fiercely, her cheeks and eyes blazing with wrath.

"I do not," returned Molly, sitting up and speaking with unusual strength and energy. "I accuse

him of—I hardly know what. Of being perhaps secretly married. The world says so, more and more openly of late."

"The world!" cried Essie scornfully. "And you, Molly, of all women living believe the world!"

"I do not say 'tis true, but it would explain much that has been singular in his conduct. You must admit too 'tis pretty odd that Mrs. Johnson receives his company for him at the Deanery on public days—and he has never allowed us to appear there on those days, though he at one time frequently declared that we were the only friends he possessed in Dublin. Why may we not see Mrs. Johnson?"

"I will own to you, Molly," said Esther, mastering her anger, but speaking with reluctance, "he admits Mrs. Johnson to be of a jealous disposition and averse to his forming intimate friendships with other persons of her sex."

"What right has he given her to control his intimacies? Tell me, Essie, dearest Essie, on your honour, do you believe Mrs. Johnson to have no claim that forbids his offering marriage to another woman?"

"Why should he offer marriage?" returned Esther, as white as a sheet. "He considers friendship to conduce more to happiness."

"Friendship!" cried Molly. "I know well enough what friendship means, and value it too, but 'tis madness to call this attachment of yours friendship. Tell me, on your conscience, Essie, do you believe Mrs. Johnson has claims that prevent his offering to marry you?"

"I have sometimes hoped so—since we came to Ireland," replied Esther, covering her face.

"Hoped?" repeated Molly in amazement.

"Yes," continued Esther in a very low voice. "They say she is of an extremely weakly constitution—and should anything happen to her—why, then it might be that that supreme happiness which I cannot but desire would be granted to me!"

"Esther!" cried Molly, can this indeed be you? You, that was all honour and generosity, all mercy

and tenderness to every living creature, whether man or beast. Heavens, what a change is here! What a deadly change! O Essie, my dear, my honoured sister, 'tis not your little Molly speaks to you now; 'tis a woman who has suffered much and learned a little in this life, and who must very soon enter another. Think—how will you answer this to your Maker when you come to be in my situation? —How can you answer it now to your own heart? You *hope* to have been an instrument of wrong and suffering to another. You look eagerly for her death that your own happiness may be advanced. Shame, Essie, shame!"—and she paused breathless.

Esther sank lower and lower as her sister was speaking, till she was crouching on the ground with her face buried in Molly's draperies and the cushions of the couch. She did not answer immediately, and when she did so, it was in a strangled voice.

"Ay, 'tis easy to talk, to see 'tis wrong, but you don't understand. You don't know what it means to care as I do. 'Tis impossible I should feel otherwise. It may be wrong for a drowning man to clutch at one that's swimming, yet none blames him for doing it. 'Tis just as unavoidable for me to hope, to wish—*that*. You would if you was in my place, if you suffered what I have suffered this ten years."

"Perhaps I might, no doubt I should, my dear; that does not make it any better. Essie, no good has come to you from the Dean, nor ever will. He's a good friend and I love him dearly, but I love you far better, and I implore you when I am dead to leave this country and see him no more. Think of it. You have sense, and must perceive 'tis your only right and wise course. Either he will not or he cannot marry you. Essie, I implore you, consider this matter and promise me to give him up. Promise me this, and I shall die in peace."

Esther still lay crouched upon the floor. Her shoulders heaved with a few deep sobs, and her hands were clasped convulsively.

"I would die for you, Molly," she said at length in a hoarse faint voice, "I would indeed. But I

can't do that. You ask me what is impossible. I tell you I cannot."

Molly gave an exclamation of despair, and leaning back on her couch closed her eyes.

"At least," she resumed, opening them, "you can promise me to learn the precise truth. That it is your duty to the Dean and Mrs. Johnson as well as yourself to know, and he must tell it you."

"I dare not ask him. You don't guess how angry he was that I should mention it that time years ago, and either I grow more cowardly or his displeasure more awful. Before we came to Ireland I most solemnly promised never to speak to him of marriage, and in Dublin I promised him never again to torment him on the score of Mrs. Johnson. I cannot break my word to him."

"Go to herself then," returned Molly. "If she is his wife, as one as intimate with him as Mr. Ford scruples not to hint, she'll not hide it from you, and she has no right to keep you from this knowledge. You can at least promise me to do your utmost to discover the truth."

"I would rather not promise anything, dear Molly," replied Esther humbly.

Molly turned her head aside on the cushion, and two tears stood on her cheeks.

"Then do not," she said. "Go your own way. You break my heart and make me glad to die."

Esther gave a cry and threw her arms round her sister.

"Moll, Moll, my own dear, what am I to do? What do you wish?—I'll promise you anything you will, except to give him up. I can't do that, Moll. I could sooner tear the heart out of my breast. Ah, you don't know. I'll promise you anything but that."

"Promise me then, Hess, to try earnestly to find out the truth about this matter of Mrs Johnson, by any means that seem most convenient. I do not say at once, but when the occasion offers."

Esther was weeping bitterly with her head on her sister's shoulder.

"I dare not—I dare not," she said between her sobs.

There was a loud knock at the house-door, and she lifted her head to listen eagerly and wipe the tears from her eyes.

"No, it cannot be. It is too late," she said, Then starting up: "Whom are you expecting? I can see no one."

And without waiting for an answer she fled from the room.

In a minute or two the man-servant entered and announced a gentleman to wait on Miss Mary. A quick, firm step sounded across the floor, and some one coming through the fire-lit twilight grasped her hands in silence. A moment more and they were alone.

"Francis!" she cried, "I dared not hope it was you."

"Yet you wrote to me to come."

"Well, thank God you are come! I hardly thought you could reach Ireland so soon! Thank God you are here!"

And she sank down on her couch again.

"I started immediately on receiving your letter and had a fair wind all the voyage; and there's little to tempt a man to delay between this and Cork. I find the inns are still the scurviest in the world—you'd find better lying in an Indian wigwam."

CHAPTER II.

"I PITY ye, Mrs. Biddy, sure I pity ye!"

And Patrick shaking his head at the cook with an air of deep commiseration, set down his basin and other shaving apparatus sharply on the kitchen dresser. Biddy looked round with open mouth and hand suspended in the act of basting a joint, somewhat inadequately, with a silver-gilt tea-spoon; for at the Deanery as elsewhere Saxon tyranny and prejudice, embodied in Mrs. Brent the housekeeper, the

Dean and Mrs. Johnson, while preserving a semblance of order, was powerless to enslave the free Irish spirit.

"Holy Mother, Mr. Patrick, whatever is the matter?"

"Only this, Cook, jewel—and ye may believe me, for I niver tould a lie—if an angel from heaven was cooking that dinner—Faith, what am I saying of angels, when 'tis yourself I see before me?—But if 'twas the Apostle Paul, the Master 'd be afther to call it ill-done, and calling it ruinated, before all the ballyrag quality. Ah, Biddy darlint, ye may think ye've come to a bachelor family, where your iligant shape and purty manners (those were advantages with which Patrick persevered in crediting the cook of the moment, under the most discouraging circumstances) 'll give you a gineral Absolution. That's not the way at all, at all. There's Brent that's the very mischief, and Mrs. Johnson I'll call by no such iligant name, but say she's the very Divil; and the Dean himself, poor man, that's got prying ways and knows very little what becomes his station. I've had hopes he'd better himself by a decent marriage wid one of the ould sthock"—here Patrick collapsed onto a stool and shook his head mournfully. "But I doubt 'tis all off. Tell me, Mrs. Biddy, was it Miss Vanhomrigh's gintleman brought the letter?"

"Faith, 'twas no gintleman at all," replied the untutored Biddy. "'Twas a little old footman in a green livery."

"That's him," returned Patrick. "Once on a time the Master 'd be in a mighty merry humour, when the old leprechaun in green had been here, but now—ah, 'tis just the other way. O Biddy, if only I could read, I might have foreseen this. But when I was in London, we gintlemen's gintlemen left larning to the clargy. Ah, I've come down in my notions, or as some might say have got sinse since then, and know a little larning is useful in my thrade. 'Tis mighty provoking now to think I've seen Miss Vanhomrigh's hand again and again this ten years, and couldn't make it out or even swear to 't, though

for all the Dean's hide-away tricks, I've looked at his letters from every corner of the paper. If I'd been a scholar, the divil's in it but I should have known in time this match was off, and all along of Mrs. Johnson, I doubt—bad luck to her!"

"Well, well, Mr. Patrick, if Mrs. Johnson *is* a bit troublesome of an afternoon, she don't come lampooning round of a morning, so I'd be in no hurry for the Master to bring a Mistress in, if I was you."

"Begorra, 'tis not me comfort, 'tis me dignity I'm considering, Mrs. Biddy," returned Patrick, sitting up. "Miss Vanhomrigh's a lady. I won't say she's such a lady as her mamma that was fit to be wife to a nobleman, but a lady she is. What's Mrs. Johnson? Her father a bailiff, they say, and her mother a housekeeper. 'Tisn't such thrash that I'd have put over me, nor over you, me dear, and if 'tweren't for the poor master, I'd go back to London by post. But there, though he's a bit touched," and Patrick pointed to his own head, "and bad enough when he's in his tantrums, he's a good old soul in his way, and he'd never get on widout me. Sure I'd never have the heart to leave him, poor crayture, just as he's disappointed of Miss Vanhomrigh. Bejapers, he tossed his head about over her letter this morning so 'twas small blame to him he got a skelp of the razor; I was in dread he'd be kilt meself."

Here there were voices outside which caused Patrick to start up and hurriedly seize his basin, and Biddy to thrust the tea-spoon up her sleeve, which served her as a pocket, and stare wildly round the kitchen in search of a humbler implement.

"Here, Cook, here's our share of the dinner," said Mrs. Johnson, bustling in with a large basket on her arm, followed by Mrs. Dingley similarly laden. "Why, Patrick, you have not got your livery on! Don't you know company's expected?"

Meantime the Dean was applying as well as he could some small pieces of plaster to the cuts bestowed on him by Patrick. He was clumsy and could not make the plaster stick; so there he stood, muttering decorous curses before the shaving-glass

in the upstairs room, which he used partly as a dressing-room and partly as a study, as being more private than his library. At a certain moment he became mentally conscious of the reflection in the glass, which he had before been staring into merely with a view to the arrangement of his strips of plaster. The elderly annoyed face seen thus close, its general impressiveness of outline and indefinable air of power and brilliancy lost in the details of line and wrinkle, was certainly not beautiful, nor even attractive. He saw that plainly enough, and a smile of bitter humour parted his lips, and broadened till it showed two rows of strong teeth, still white and regular.

"Upon my word, Chloe," he said, addressing a letter that lay open on the table before him. "I wish you joy of your Corydon. A prettier fellow never danced on the green, and I doubt not that in the days of Methusaleh he would have been reckoned just of an age to begin taking his lessons in Love."

He took up the letter and began re-reading with pishes and pshaws of impatience; but as he continued he ceased to jeer either at the writer or at the image in the glass. He leaned back in his chair and sighed a sigh half of weariness, half of pain. It was only like the rest of her letters. A cry of passionate adoration, of passionate reproach and anguish.

"Don't flatter yourself," said the letter, "don't flatter yourself that separation will ever change my sentiments; for I find myself unquiet in the midst of silence, and my heart is at once pierced with sorrow and love. For Heaven's sake, tell me what has caused this prodigious change in you, which I have found of late! If you have the least remains of pity for me left, tell me tenderly. No: don't tell it so, that it may cause my present death, and don't suffer me to live a life like a languishing death, which is the only life I can lead, if you have lost any of your tenderness for me."

So it ended, and he sighed again and fell once more into the old train of thought. Yet as years went on

the course of it had altered, at first imperceptibly, but now always more perceptibly. From the moment of Miss Vanhomrigh's arrival in Dublin he had been subject to fits of intense annoyance at her presence there, compounded of impatience at the passionate and exacting nature of her attachment to him and fear lest it should give rise to an explosion in what was really his domestic circle, or to a public scandal. But at one time these fits alternated with an only too clear realisation of the fact that he was never truly happy except in that "Sluttery" in Turnstile Alley, Dublin, which had been arranged so as to take him back in fancy to another "Sluttery" in dear St. James' Street, London. The Dublin world was violently hostile to him, and had it not been so it contained few who were fitted to be his companions. It was only in those stolen hours at the Vanhomrighs' that he could shake off the consciousness of his new uncongenial surroundings, and feel himself in touch again with his London life. The little elegancies and luxuries he found there were pleasant to him in themselves, opposite as they were to his own hard and frugal manner of life, and pleasanter still because they recalled to him the days when he was the honoured guest and friend of the finest and wittiest ladies in London. And besides all that, and partly because of it, there was another and a deeper cause why he had found so great a fascination in the "little times," the "drinking of coffee," as he called those visits of his, in the kind of cypher language which his fancy and his caution induced him to use when addressing Miss Vanhomrigh—a clumsy caution, since like the conspirator's mask in a melodrama it invited suspicion. When she first came to her residence in Ireland, it might be truly said that Swift was "in love" with Esther Vanhomrigh, if it were once fairly admitted that there are as many different meanings to that phrase as there are different dispositions in the world. In the case of Swift it implied no all-pervading passion or emotion, but a sentiment which flitted over the surface of his nature, and came or went without deflecting its deeper currents. For years this senti-

ment had been as it were the bloom on his true affection for Esther Johnson, and had they never separated, their attachment might have remained among the golden pages in the Book of the human heart. But it had been his pride to reflect that his feeling for Esther Johnson, tender as it was, had never had power to shake the conclusions of his judgment; so he had neither married her nor allowed her to follow him to London. But the mistakes of pure reason are sometimes as foolish as those of pure love, since both of them reckon with but one side of human nature.

Fate, it must be admitted, seemed bent on showing the great satirist that her humour was as biting as his own; especially when she bestowed on Esther Vanhomrigh an estate in County Dublin. At first legal business obliged Esther to take lodgings in the town itself, which she did with pleasure, little imagining the awkward situation in which she was placing her Cadenus. His friend Gay would have found there material for another "Beggar's Opera," with a Dean in the part of Macheath. It was true, truer than he himself knew, that the Dean could have been happy with either, if "t'other dear charmer" had been away. Their mutual tenderness, and the extreme adaptability of Mrs. Johnson's mind and character, would soon have closed the gulf that Swift's absence in England had opened between himself and her, had there not been a reason for coldness on one side and uneasiness on the other. She could never have given him that understanding sympathy in his highest interests which he found with Esther Vanhomrigh, but her social charm and wit, her "festivity," as her friend Delany called it, and the natural philosophy of her disposition, were completely in harmony with other sides of his complex nature. Swift's love for her might have lost its bloom, it might have been in abeyance, but it could not be wholly destroyed. It was never, however, in so much peril as for the first years after his return to the Deanery. His public and social life was full of difficulties and disagreeables; now was the time when the old gay, unexacting

tenderness he had learned to expect from Ppt. would have exerted more than its old charm. He found instead a measured friendliness, an irritability that showed itself in cold sarcasm to himself and in downright snubs to Dingley. Dingley, too, gave him the impression that she was secretly against him. The presence of Dingley at all their interviews had been a condition of his own making, which he was therefore ashamed to break of his own accord, but he sometimes wished Ppt. would have whispered to him in her pretty way, half-laughing, half-wistful, that she had an errand in the town for Dingley, if he could possibly spare his D. D. Once she would do so, and he would say "No" to the suggestion. Now he would have hailed it, but she appeared resigned to the situation or averse to seeing him alone. He wondered what she knew, but concluding silence and jealousy incompatibilities in a woman, he unjustly suspected her friend and his own predecessor, Dr. Sterne, of having spoiled her by a too servile admiration, and even perhaps by an offer of marriage. Meantime his happiest hours were spent at the Vanhomrighs' ; in the warm atmosphere of Esther's love and ardent sympathy. Little by little beneath the stress of his own feelings and of her complaints, his resolution to seldom go there gave way. He never went often enough to satisfy her, but at least he went often enough to set afloat the gossip to which he was so femininely sensitive. Angry with himself, with Esther, with everybody, he determined to break off their intercourse for a time, and she submitted with a better grace than he expected, triumphantly conscious that his relations to her had become much more tender during the year and a half that she had been in Ireland, and not yet believing Mrs. Johnson to be a serious obstacle. She removed to Cellbridge, but the report which had reached Swift reached Ppt. also. She had heard enough and to spare of the Miss Vanhomrighs' elegance and "abundance of wit," and the good fortunes they would have when their law-matters were settled. As new-comers they had made some sensation in Dublin. Mrs. Johnson's friend, Mr. Ford,

who was snut out of politics by the fall of his party, finding them well received, had devoted his leisure to falling seriously in love with Molly, who, though more delicate than of old, had not been an invalid during the first years of their residence in Dublin. The Vanhomrighs, however, did not forgive his former defection. Then came the definite report that Swift was to marry the elder. In vain did the two ladies retire to Cellbridge, and Swift pay his daily visit at Ppt.'s lodgings on Ormonde's Quay, with a punctuality born of self-reproach and a reaction of feeling. Ppt. was not only pale and worn, but she, the soul of "festivity," was silent and depressed. At length came a day when she was ill and would not see the Dean. Day after day passed, and still she would not see him. Swift was miserable. He realised then how deeply-rooted was this old attachment, and how ill he could spare her out of his life. But so strong was the wall of reserve that had grown up between these two reserved natures and their common shrinking from the "scene" that could alone break it down—a shrinking accentuated on Swift's side by an uneasy conscience—that he preferred making a confidant of a third person to facing an explanation with Mrs. Johnson. He selected the Bishop of Dromore for the delicate part of go-between; and Ppt. was grateful to him for not having approached her directly. She feared that the pent-up feelings of years might break out at his touch in a way painful to both, and sweep before them the last remnants of his love. With the Bishop she was able to preserve her dignity. She told him how long she had known of the intimacy between the Dean and Miss Vanhomrigh, and of the continual uneasiness she suffered at his silence on the subject, and at the persistent reports of his intention to marry the lady. The end of it was that a few months after, in the twilight of an April evening, Ppt. stole out and over the bridge to the Deanery without her Dingley. Swift himself opened the door to her. He looked pale and serious, but very gentle and kind. He had made a great sacrifice of feeling in offering to marry Esther Johnson privately, and it did not strike

him, nor even her at the time, that the sacrifice was imadequate. He drew her into the dining-parlour, put his arm round her and kissed her gravely on the hair, and she laid her still beautiful head on his shoulder. They were silent, for the thoughts of both flew back to the only other time when they had stood in the eternal lover's attitude. Then—

"Do you remember the pleached walk at Moor Park?" she asked with a little nervous laugh, like a girl's.

"Yes—yes," he answered sadly, staring over her head with melancholy, cavernous eyes. He saw the green pleached walk, with the summer shower and the summer sunshine glistening at once upon it; he saw the pair that had sheltered beneath it, the tall, dark, ill-dressed young Secretary, gnawed by dissatisfied pride and ambition, and saw beside him that gay, enchanting creature, half child, half woman, who had known so well how to soothe alike the sufferings of his heart and of his vanity—whose toy and whose idol, whose slave and whose god he had been in the idyllic days at Moor Park. He saw her as if it had been yesterday, as she stood there on a garden bench reaching up to catch a cherry-tree spray, that had somehow found its way through the upper greenery of the pleached walk, and pulling and eating the ripe crimson cherries with childish eagerness. And she had thrown a bunch down to him, and he had let them fall on the ground, and would not eat them. Then playful, yet a little petulant too, she shook the rain-laden branches above him, and down rushed a cold glittering shower of water over his head and shoulders, and also between his neck and his cravatte. An exclamation of anger on his part, and at a bound she was close to him, hastily wiping his coat with her handkerchief, and lifting the loveliest of young faces, half laughing, half pleading, to his. So it had happened that his arms had been round her before this, and then he had kissed her, not as now and sometimes since, once on the forehead, but a dozen times on the mouth. Perhaps the advent of an under-

gardener had alone prevented the utterance of some word too definite to be withdrawn. As it was, he regained his prudence and presence of mind sufficiently to say with pretended severity as they walked homewards, that Ppt. was grown a great girl now and must give up her hoyden ways, and he for his part begged pardon for forgetting that she was no longer a little miss but a fine young lady, and should be careful to remember it in his future behaviour. Yet the brief episode, whose significance he had thus at once tried to obliterate, had remained in both their memories.

"We are both of us a little older than we were then," said the Dean, shrugging his shoulders and smiling sadly. "Even you, Ppt., are a little the worse for wear, though you are still too handsome by half to throw yourself away on a battered old hulk like me. Yes, we are too old friends to turn lovers; but believe me, my dear, if anything could have given me a greater affection and esteem for you than I had before, 'tis this conduct of yours, so much above your sex—this keeping silence when—in a matter which—which——" He paused.

"Hush!" she cried nervously. "Don't let's speak of it; 'tis all over as far as I am concerned. Believe me, dear honoured friend, I have been nothing but proud and content to be loved any fashion you chose, so long as you loved me. And you do love me, don't you, Pdfr.?"

"Oh, yes, Ppt. No one knows me as well as you do. We were very happy together once, and now we are going to be happy together again, aren't we, Ppt.?"

"Quite happy," she answered with a smile of confidence, and arm in arm they went out into the garden, where the Bishop and Mr. Ford were awaiting them. Mr. Ford, as a friend equally devoted to Swift and Mrs. Johnson, was to be the only witness of the marriage ceremony, except Mrs. Brent, the Dean's faithful housekeeper. There was a very small ruined chapel in the garden of the Deanery, and when the twilight was deepening to darkness, the Bishop

slipped on a surplice and stood where the altar had been. Mr. Ford held a small lantern where it could give just light to read the service by, while Mrs. Brent stood sentinel at the door. Hastily and in a low voice the Bishop read a shortened form of the marriage service to the little group round the lantern. It was a still night; and the thick ivy on the ruined walls gleamed in the light unstirred by any wind, and the hubbub of the city was plainly audible about them, the coaches rolling to rout or theatre, the cries of chairmen and link-boys, and the loud chaffering of buyers and sellers at the itinerant stalls within the Liberties of the Cathedral. Only a few feet of stone separated them from the crowd, which from high to low would have been keenly interested in their proceedings, had it been aware of them. But the brief ceremony passed without detection. Directly it was over Mr. Ford closed the dark lantern and the Bishop slipped off his surplice. There was a silence, only broken by a deep sigh. Whoever sighed it was not the bride.

Half an hour afterwards the unconscious Dingley was lending the sanction of her presence to a supper, which she little imagined to be a bridal entertainment.

This strange marriage did not give Mrs. Johnson —she never used the name of Swift—the complete and permanent ease of mind she at first believed that it did, but it freed her from the dread of seeing the position which she had abstained from claiming, yielded to a rival. And though it could not at once recall to her the vagrant heart of her friend, yet it was not without influence on him. His will had always in the end proved stronger than his inclinations; it had never come so near being conquered by them as in the matter of Esther Vanhomrigh. He knew that his interviews with her had gradually come to be more lover-like than was prudent or honourable; he had tried to put some stop to them before, but in vain. Now that he was formally bound to another woman, he felt it absolutely incumbent on him to make some change in their relations, at what-

ever cost to both. The gossip which had come to his ears gave him an excuse for not visiting her at Cellbridge that summer, and he never afterwards visited her frequently. A course of this starvation soon reduced his love for her to the dimensions of a tender but not inconvenient friendship; nor could he bring himself to believe that it had not had the same effect on her. He looked back to his earlier relations with her as the most interesting and thrilling, if not the sweetest episode in his life, but apart from the fact of his marriage, he was conscious that every year he became a more unsuitable object for a romantic passion. He could not bear to be made ridiculous. So it came to pass that Esther's letters—alas! how terribly alike, month after month, year after year!—those letters which he had once torn open and devoured so eagerly, were now too often deliberately set down on his table, till a dish of coffee, a walk, or some other invigorating incident had put Cadenus into spirits to face their contents.

A sound of well-known steps and voices on the stairs, and after an instant's hesitation between the fire and his escritoire, he hastily pushed Essie's letter into the escritoire and turned the key.

"Confound women!" he muttered, opening the door of his room just as Dingley and Mrs. Johnson stood outside it. "Howdee, Madam Ppt.? Pray now stick this rascally plaster on; I think 'tis the worst that ever was made."

"Oh, you bad workman!" smiled Ppt. "I warrant 'tis not the poor plaster is in fault." And she cut a fresh strip or two and applied them. Meanwhile Swift went on grumbling.

"You are precious late in bringing the dinner. I told you you'd find little enough here."

"You are better than your word," returned Ppt. "'Tis a mercy you are generally that, or D. D. and I would lead a fine life. There is a good joint in the kitchen, and we have brought the rest ready prepared. I told you your part should be the wine."

"Ay, you sent a pretty message, *hoping* I would

give you a good bottle. One would suppose 'twas my custom to give you bad. Well, I can't give you *Mer*goose, because there an't such a thing, silly, but *Mar*goose there is for you and any other goose to mar its stomach with. Why the deuce must you be drinking and gaming every night of your life? Why can't you read? Some women do."

"Yes, and are laughed at for their pains by every man alive except you, Presto," returned Mrs. Johnson drily.

Presto was a name given to Swift by an Italian lady, which had commended itself to Stella's fancy, and almost superseded the old "Pdfr."

"Sure, Dean, if you had your way, you'd make poor Hetty lose the use of her eyes with your reading and stuff," put in Dingley.

"O you be quiet, Dingley," said Hetty, always ungrateful to her partisan. "Now see here, you naughty, naughty Rogue," and she held a long strip of plaster before his eyes. "If you won't be a good civil boy, and will be a bad quarrelling boy, I'll just clap this strip of plaster across your mouth and shut it up during my Majesty's pleasure, for you know you'll never get it off for yourself."

Swift smiled, and his good humour returned to him. "Of all the impudent, pretending hussies——!" he cried. Then he had to submit to sundry criticisms on his attire, and be sent to put on the new silk gown which Hetty had ordered for him, and which she had just seen the tailor's man bring to the door, and at last he was considered ready to receive his guests. It was not one of his public days, but Mrs. Johnson had hastily contrived a little party in honour of the betrothal of Archdeacon Walls' eldest daughter to Mr. Smith, a young English clergyman.

In those days there was no eating off silver-gilt plate at the Deanery, but on the other hand the Dean's quarrels with his servants did not rage unremittingly during the whole of dinner, as was the case in his old age. Mrs. Johnson, sparkling at the other end of the table, did much to keep him quiet and contented. He had grown proud of her again, prouder even than

he had been in her lovely girlhood. She was now undeniably past her youth, but hers was not a fugitive beauty, nor did her indefinable charm depend on that. Her character had lost none of its suppleness with years. She had discovered, and gradually adapted herself as far as possible to the taste for feminine elegance which Swift had brought back from London, while her mind had once more risen to the level of the society which he gathered round him. Their circle had at first been small, but of late years it had rapidly widened. His wide and just benevolence, his kind-heartedness and intellectual gifts had won over to him both the poor and the more intelligent among the rich, before his defence of Irish manufactures had given him a more universal popularity.

"Delany," he cried, mixing some water and sugar with his "Margoose"—as he and other good Britons called their Château Margaux—"the toast is Irish manufactures. 'Tis no matter whether you approve it, for any one sitting next Mrs. Johnson is bound to drink it or have the devil to pay. Mr. Smith, sir," to the young English clergyman, who was sitting up with ostentatious stiffness on her other side, "pray fill your glass. Mrs. Johnson insists."

"Tilly vally, no politics among friends, Dean," said she apprehensively, holding up her finger.

"No! No politics!" thundered the Dean. "Only Patriotism. Irish manufactures, gentlemen!"

And he raised his glass—but set it down untasted, staring in silence at the opposite wall, where something seemed to have caught his eye. Sucking in his cheeks, after his manner when tempted to laugh:

"James Murphy," he said with dangerous mildness, addressing a raw Irish servant who stood at the sideboard immediately behind him; "James Murphy, is not that enough for to-day?—Three penn'orth of Malaga raisins and one penn'orth of sweet almonds makes fourpence; but as I scorn to be outdone by a servant, even in stealing, I deduct eightpence from your board wages."

The unfortunate James, who was a new acquisition and could not imagine how his master came to have eyes in the back of his head, gasped aloud, and plunging forward with the dessert dish in his trembling hands, put it down on the table with a crash that made the glasses ring and sent half its contents flying across the polished mahogany. Patrick, aware of the mirrors on the walls by means of which the Dean, whenever he sat at his round table, could see what was going on behind him, grinned as much as he dared. A furtive smile went round the table. Ppt. blushed and bit her lip. Dr. Delany, a good friend to Swift, and a better to her, laughed good-naturedly and cried out :

"Come, Dean, you are forgetting your toast. Mrs. Johnson is all impatience."

Swift coloured and drooped his head in a momentary confusion, then raising his glass he glanced across the table at Ppt., with his brightest, tenderest smile.

"Faith, Stella shall lead off. We fellows are never so happy as when we come after *her*. If Mr. Walpole himself were here, she'd make him drink his own damnation."

So Mrs. Johnson gave the toast.

"Irish manufactures!" she cried. "Down with English monopolies!"

Enthusiastic voices echoed round the table, and there was a great tossing of bumpers. Mr. Smith alone sat silent and touched his glass with pinched lips. Swift addressed him in his most courteous manner.

"Perhaps, sir, you fear to be drawn into party politics, but, faith, 'tis no such matter. Whig or Tory, we English in Ireland are all of one mind in resisting tyranny."

"I trust, Mr. Dean, in whatever country I may be, to remain a faithful friend to His Majesty's ministers," replied Mr. Smith stiffly.

"I see, sir," replied Swift, bravely repressing a sarcasm, "you fancy this old turncoat is trying to seduce you, but believe me when you have been in

Ireland a bit longer, you'll not go over to the other side of the House—you'll be clean against the House altogether. What's Whig and Tory to you and me, sir? We've got our own country's affairs to see after, and whatever new-comers may think, they very soon join the Irish party—unless they have something to get by sticking to Ministers."

"Mr. Dean," said Dr. Winter, his pale, intellectual face flushed with enthusiasm, "Mr. Dean, I trust you believe there are some of us would not betray our country for all the offices and preferments that ever were bestowed upon the venal."

"I believe that at least seven virtuous men might be found in this city, Winter," returned the Dean kindly, "and that you are one of them. But we Catos are not the only useful persons. I remember some ten years ago, when I was in London, busied with doing you Irish clergy that service for which you have ever since so cordially detested me——"

Here he was interrupted by groans and cries of "No, no."

"O but I say 'Yes, yes.'—Well, ten years ago I waited on an Irish clergyman that had got preferment in England, and entreated him, that was a known patriot, to use his glib tongue in favour of his poor country. 'With your eloquence, my dear sir,' says I—O, but I was a courtier then, Madam Stella!—'With your eloquence, what influence may you not exert?' 'Nothing, sir,' says he, with a twinkle in his eye, 'in comparison to what 'twill be when I am Canon of Mudchester. My patriotism is red-hot, sir, and will not grow cold by a little keeping.' When he was Canon I waited on him again, but he assured me that his patriotism would show much better from the elevation of a Deanery. So, more for diversion than profit, I addressed myself to him at every step in his promotion, till he had arrived at his second Bishopric. 'At length, sir,' says he, 'I can gratify you, for no Irishman will ever be promoted to the Primacy. Let us consider the wrongs of our unhappy country.' And ever since he has been doing so, ay, and to some purpose."

"Yet I hope you'll allow us to prefer before his a patriotism like yours, Mr. Dean," said Dr. Winter, "that's beyond the control of ambition."

"How do you know that, sir?" returned Swift drily. "You must be sensible there's not a cat in Ireland but's had as good a chance of promotion as myself this eight years. I might have forgot my country had I stayed in London—but never, I think, remembered its wrongs with indifference. I'll say for myself that I heartily hate iniquity wherever and whosoever's it may be.—Oh, I grow lean with hating it! Delany, how comes it you and Mrs. Johnson grow fat among the Philistines? Why does not your flesh shrink at the unrighteousness of the wicked?"

"Because, Mr. Dean," returned Dr. Delany, "we have an eleventh commandment against that."

"How so, Doctor?"

"'Fret not thyself because of the ungodly.'"

"A very good answer, Delany, a very good answer," returned Swift gently and sighed. "As for Mrs. Johnson, if I could put into my head half the philosophy of her heart, I should be the very prince of philosophers."

So he resigned for a time the leadership of the conversation, and Mrs. Johnson began describing the humours of a hunting-party at Mr. Ford's country-seat, where she had lately been staying, and every one laughed except Mr. Smith, who was determined not to commit himself in any direction. Then coffee came in, which the Dean insisted on making himself, for he openly called Mrs. Johnson's coffee ratsbane, and always declared he knew but one other person besides himself whose coffee was worth drinking; but would only grunt if an indiscreet friend inquired who that person might be. For it was Esther Vanhomrigh.

Now Madam Ppt. dearly loved cards. On Sundays the Dean read her a sermon, and she did battle the while conscientiously, but not always successfully, with sleep, generally contriving to catch the last word he had read, when he startled her by asking what it was in a tone of severe suspicion. On week-

days she played piquet, quadrille, or a round game, according to the number of the party, either from dinner to supper, or from supper to bed-time, and sometimes both. Swift did not love cards, though he played with Ppt. most days. So this evening, not a great while after dinner, when the parlour shutters were closed and the table and candles put out for a round game, he cried off it, and took Dr. Winter to his library, "to see all the money he had got when he was in the Ministry," as he said. Then he opened some of his numerous little drawers, and showed a collection of antique coins, some brought for him by Lord Peterborough from Italy and Spain, others sent by Lady Mary Wortley Montague, through Mr. Pope. Also he exhibited certain trinkets and curiosities, given him by Lady Betty Germayne and other people of quality in London. Lastly, he brought forth the real attraction of his library, two long churchwarden pipes and a jar of tobacco.

"Do you smoke, Winter?" he asked in a somewhat shame-faced way. "If not, you must excuse me; I learned to smoke at Oxford when I was a young man."

"I love a pipe very well, sir," returned Dr. Winter, with perfect truthfulness, and began to fill a churchwarden from the jar, as one who well knew how. But in so doing he sprinkled some tobacco on the floor. Swift was on his knees in a minute, carefully sweeping it up.

"Pray take care, sir, or Mrs.—Mrs. Brent will think us sad sluts. Mrs. Johnson always tells me 'tis very dirty and disgusting to one's neighbours to smoke, and not at all becoming to a dignitary of the Church; but I say if I mayn't smoke as I'm a Dean, I may as I'm a man of letters and an Oxford man. All Oxford men smoke."

Swift had for so many years dwelt with pleasure on his connection with Oxford, that he had almost come to believe he had received part of his education there, though in truth he had only been presented with a degree by the University, through the interest of Sir William Temple.

So they sat down on each side of the fire and began to talk. And first they fell into a dispute which was already an old one between them, on the subject of the Bank of Ireland—a proposed institution which Swift had combated with but too much success. Mr. Winter, being a young man, was instinctively in sympathy with the spirit of commercial enterprise which was the most important characteristic of his generation. Having fought this battle o'er again, they turned to discuss the League for the exclusive support of Irish manufactures; and here they were at one. This being largely a question of dress, the transition was easy to the subject of Dublin ladies in general, and so to Miss Vanhomrigh, who, it is needless to say, had been among the first to join the League. Then Dr. Winter boldly asked the Dean to forward his suit with Esther. Swift made no answer, but started upright in his chair, took the pipe out of his mouth, and looked at the young man in a truly portentous manner.

Dr. Winter replied to the look with dignity: "If you think me unworthy of your friend, Mr. Dean, I can but make my excuses for having broached the business to you. But I shall not discontinue my addresses to her."

"What's that to me, sir?" cried Swift, leaning forward with his back to the light and poking the fire noisily. "Continue them till Doomsday if 'tis your pleasure so to do."

There was a silence, and presently Dr. Winter rose, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and said coldly:

"With your leave, Mr. Dean, I will go wish good evening to the ladies."

He made his bow and would have left the room, but Swift caught him by the sleeve.

"Pooh, my dear man," he said, "will you quarrel with a friend about a woman? Believe an old fellow that's past these frailties, there's not a slut in the world that's worth it. I ask your pardon if I have treated you roughly through mere surprise and—admiration at your demand. Come now, sit down and let us talk the matter over."

Dr. Winter consented to be mollified.

"The truth is, sir," continued the Dean, "Miss Vanhomrigh, like other persons of sense, hath a true philosophical disinclination for the bonds of matrimony——" Here he broke off, conscious that though this was a state of mind which he had been endeavouring for ten years to produce in her, he had been eminently unsuccessful in so doing, and went on hurriedly. "Dr. Price, who is as you are aware a gentleman of learning and good preferment, paid his addresses to her a few years since, but she would none of him. And Mr. Ford had a like ill-fortune with Mrs. Mary, before her sickness showed itself to be mortal."

"I fear, sir, poor Mrs. Mary hath but a little time longer in this world," returned Dr. Winter. "Miss Vanhomrigh may then find a single state less agreeable than she supposes. I did not ask you to press my suit upon her immediately, but to lend me your influence with her as seemed most convenient."

"'Tis a very serious matter that you would have me engage in, Winter," said he. "To assist two persons, for both of whom I have so great a friendship and esteem, to enter into a state I love and esteem so little. Yet, God knows, if 'twill in truth make you both content—and such instances may be found—God knows I would not be backward in the business. I'll promise you nothing at present, nothing except to consider your wish and do the best for you according to my judgment. She is indeed very superior to the generality of her sex, and has the most generous spirit in the world to those she loves. She has also a discerning mind and some reading, which fits her to be the helpmeet of a scholar and a man of wit. Besides, her housewifery is superior to that of many ladies who thank God aloud, when a suitor is by, 'they can make a pudden and choose a silk, but never could abide their book.' Yet after all she's but a woman, and Satan made her, whatever the Scriptures may say. Come, light another pipe, and let us converse on reasonable matters."

CHAPTER III.

One day, a week after Francis Earle's arrival, he and Molly were again alone together in the garden-parlour. Molly lay idle on her couch, and Francis was making a careful map, from sundry rough jottings, of the district round him in America. His life there was exceedingly busy, as his military and organising talents had early made him a central figure in the distant colony to which he had gone, peopled as it was by all classes except the wealthy and educated, and lying on the edge of the Indian-haunted wilderness. This active and also solitary life had made him considerably more silent than in old days, and less sarcastic; for sarcasm is a weapon that those who have to govern others learn to keep mostly in the sheath. The map did not advance quickly. At length he ceased from the pretence of it, and sat completely idle, biting his pen and looking out of the window. Both he and Molly were silent, but probably their thoughts were moving in the same direction, for Swift had arrived that day with a packet of manuscript, and was now closeted with Esther in the book-room. Presently Francis rose and stood leaning on the mantelpiece.

"Molly," he said abruptly, "has this," and he made a gesture with his head in the direction of the book-room, "has this been going on the same all the time?"

"Yes, Frank, all the time," she answered sombrely, and their eyes met.

"Good God," he said, "'tis incredible. Ten years ago I thought it could not continue much longer. Ten years! After all that time I return, and find here precisely the same—no, not the same condition of affairs. They were doubtful, they were singular then, but now the lapse of time has made them

intolerable. 'Tis very strange, Moll; so strange it appears to me like a dream. I am ready to pinch myself, in order to wake up a foolish, discontented boy in St. James' Street."

"But, Frank," she asked, with a sudden alteration of tone, "are we not very censorious? I sometimes say to myself that sickness has made me too fretful and fanciful. Perhaps I am grown an old maid and object without reason to this friendship of my sister's. Perhaps there is no harm in it."

"No harm in it? Molly, are you mad?"

"Why, what do you think of it, Frank? Tell me truthfully.—How does it seem to you, coming back to us after all this while?"

He writhed a few moments in silence, then suddenly turning his back on her and fixing his eyes on the fire, he spoke.

"I cannot answer you, I will not. Only I beg you'll not speak as though there were a doubt in either of our minds, or in that damned scoundrel's either, that she loves him with an absorbing passion."

"Yes," she cried, starting up with animation. "And there was a time too when he loved her, I am sure of it, and yet he would not marry her. Now he never will. There's some mystery about him, Frank; 'tis the general belief, and 'tis my belief, that he is already married. What will become of her when I am gone? To be thus held off and on drives her into a kind of frenzy, yet should he wholly cast her off, and I be no more, she would—— I dare not think what she might do. Promise me you'll make her clear up this business; save her, Frank, when I am dead. She's young and strong and may live well and happy yet, if only some one will save her. I——," and her voice fell almost to a whisper, "I am not strong enough."

Francis pushed her gently back on to her pillows.

"Oh, you may trust me to do what I can," he answered shortly. "Pray now, Molly, do not be agitated, 'tis the worst thing in the world for one in your case. Where are your drops? I'm sure 'tis

time you took 'em, and Essie has forgotten. Here —I'll give 'em you. Essie used not to forget such things," he added, as he measured out the medicine.

"You won't turn away from her, Frank?" whispered Molly, looking up with an anxious fold in her brow, as she took the glass from his hand.

"No, of course not," he replied, with a pain that sounded like impatience; then sitting down near her, he continued more gently—"Who should I turn to? You and Essie and his Lordship are the only friends I have left in England, and out there are honest folks in plenty, but all rough, unlearned men. I wrote you of the Scotchman the Indians killed. That was the only friend I've made these ten years, Moll."

"Poor Frank! You seem very lonely."

"Lord! I don't say that to complain. I've plenty to busy me without repining, and am glad enough not to be a beggarly parson or usher, as I was once like to have been. What I would say is that, gratitude apart, I were less than human did I not value you and Essie."

Had he told Molly that he truly loved her sister, that all his hopes of private happiness, apart from the satisfaction he had in his busy adventurous life, hung upon the possibility of Essie's consenting to share that life with him—had he told Molly this, it would have greatly lightened the load of anxiety upon her mind in leaving her sister without the shelter and support of her own love. But an incurable habit of reticence in matters of feeling prevented his doing so.

"I never doubted your friendship, Frank," returned Molly. "You show it by risking your neck here on our account."

"Pooh, Moll! I do nothing of the sort."

"Well, you'll let me believe so, I hope, if 'twill make me easier in leaving Essie to your care."

Presently Esther came in, transformed from the hollow-eyed phantom of yesterday to a young blooming handsome woman. Swift followed close on her, he also looking bright and well-pleased. The passion and reproach that burst forth in her letters to him

never found distinct expression in his presence, partly because the awe of it controlled her, partly because she was happy when he was there. Consequently, though he might increasingly avoid her company, once in it, the old attraction re-asserted itself. They had both had a pleasant afternoon. She had sat on her favourite stool close to his elbow chair, and they had talked about old times: Kensington, Windsor, St. James' Street, and the rest—old times in England, for he did not love to talk of those first two years of her stay in Ireland, to which he perhaps alluded when in his plan for the second part of "Cadenus and Vanessa," he put down "Two hundred chapters of madness." Then they had read over a new voyage of Gulliver's, superintended some reforms in the kingdom of Brobdignag, and deplored the miseries of the kingdom of Ireland—that poor, oppressed Ireland, to which, as Esther told him, he had been sent by a discerning and beneficent Providence. Esther came in carrying a plate.

"Here is an orange ready dressed for Molly," she said, "and if Frank is good, she will give him a bit."

"He had better be merely tyrannical, and exact it as tribute," said Swift. "This is how I have obtained the best bits from fine ladies for the last twenty years."

"Molly, your drops!" cried Esther.

"Don't trouble yourself, Hess," returned Frank, drily. "I gave her them. You were wont to keep a memory once."

Essie blushed.

"I see you are determined to declare yourself to the Dean," she said. "I was just telling him your tongue was so disguised your best friends did not know it again."

Frank had darted into a corner for a lacquer table that usually stood at Molly's side, and made no answer.

"I wish, sir," said Swift with stately politeness, "you had returned to us from the East instead of from the West; for in that case you could tell these ladies with all the authority I lack, that theirs is the

best coffee and conversation in the world. You might persuade 'em not to hide such fine things in such a hole as Cellbridge. But I imagine after an American wilderness you find this a complete Paradise."

"Oh, complete—even to the serpent," returned Francis, and bit his lip ; for he was annoyed to find himself suddenly transformed once more to the insignificant youth of ten years ago, avenging his own insignificance by unobserved repartees. He would have thought that impossible, but there he was, the old Francis, and there was the old Great Man, more superb and more invulnerable than ever.

Francis did not remain very long at Cellbridge. The Vanhomrighs had hastily got rid of Anna Stone, but both they and Francis had plenty of other cousins in Dublin, and it was at once difficult to explain and not to explain his presence and his identity. Besides, he had to visit Lord Peterborough and give an account of his American stewardship. He was, however, to return. Molly had one of her wonderful rallies before he went, and it was owing to this, as well as to their common dislike of farewell scenes, that she and Francis were able to pretend he would find her still there on his return. Then in a few days she was worse than ever. Esther was compelled to acknowledge that Molly must die, and at moments as she supported the wasted little frame, herself tortured to the height of endurance by every pang it suffered, she could have welcomed any end to the struggle. Then again succeeded to that a desperate determination. Molly should not die yet, should not be allowed to let go her hold of life so soon. There is so much in having the will to live.

It was several nights since Esther had gone to bed, and she had quite left off being sleepy. All the house was quiet, for it was long after midnight. She sat idle on a stool by the fire, below the small shaded night-lamp, which did not give enough light to read by. From without came the ceaseless rushing of the Liffey, and from time to time the noise of a gusty wind that tossed the trees and passed seawards.

Either because her eyes were accustomed to the twilight, or owing to the overstrained sensitive state of her nerves, Molly's profile, lying against the pillow, was as distinctly visible to her as though it had been in the fullest light. She saw but too clearly the sharpened nose, the lips straightened by the habitual endurance of pain, the hollow cheek and the hair swept off from her face and lying above her on the pillow, thin and streaked with premature grey. Esther closed her eyes and tried to conjure up the face of the old Molly, the Molly of St. James' Street; but she could not do so with any definiteness. She could remember dresses she had worn, could remember vaguely the prettiness and brightness of her appearance, but the lineaments of the dear face that had once been always under her eyes were gone past recall. Only she knew they had been other than those she saw before her. Then with a sharp pang it came to her that in a very short time, most likely even by that day next week, this same, yet other, dear face would be lying in the dark solitary grave, hidden from her for ever, and she would be here sitting perhaps just where she sat now, and trying impotently to recall it. She rose, and slipping off her shoes lest the heels should make a noise, went and leaned on the footboard of the bed, looking intently at her sister, and trying to impress the worn sleeping face upon her memory. In a few minutes Molly suddenly opened her eyes and met Esther's.

"Yes," she said, as though she were answering to a call. Esther held up her finger for "Hush," and would have stolen back to her place, but Molly in a stronger voice than she had lately found bade her stay where she was. It was now Molly whose eyes were fixed upon Esther, while she leaned there at the bed's foot, with her chin on her hands, sometimes glancing at her sister, oftener staring at the patterns on the embroidered coverlet and listening to the sound of the river and the fitful wind outside. Was it only—it must be only a fancy that there was something of sternness and reproach in those wide bright eyes opposite her. She spoke to dispel it.

"Go to sleep, Molly."

"Ah, I wish I could," returned Molly; "but I can't. How can I sleep when you won't promise me anything?"

"What should I promise?" asked Esther, starting and turning pale.

"You know very well, but you won't do it," replied Molly, and closed her eyes with a weary pettish sigh.

Esther leaned forward, clasping her hands:

"What, my darling?" she asked in an eager whisper; Molly opened her eyes again.

"Find out whether he's married," she asked in a clear, almost loud voice.

"I will, I will; I promise you," cried Esther impulsively.

Molly smiled. She knew she could rely upon her sister's word. When the promise had escaped Esther's lips, she realised to what she had committed herself, but she dared not withdraw it. She almost staggered to a chair by the bedside and buried her face in the coverlet. Her crisp curly hair, blond still, if a shade darker than of old, was loosened for the night and fell in a thick cloud about her neck. Molly plunged her hand into it.

"I love to feel real hair sometimes. I believe, Hess, you have a finer head of it than ever. As for mine, 'tis a handful of dry hay, only as grey as a badger's."

"'Tis no matter," replied Essie, lifting her head. "Sure your friends do not regard any losses to your head, so long as its wits are not lost."

"But they are," returned Molly; "and that is no matter either."

"Pray do not talk, Molly. You promised to sleep."

"I did nothing of the sort, miss, but I will sleep presently, when I have talked a bit."

"The Doctor forbade you to talk, Molly."

Molly smiled her old mocking smile.

"Why, my dear? Because I should die the sooner? Did ever such a trifle as the fear of death

make a woman hold her tongue? I mean not to disgrace my sex but to die talking, in spite of all the doctors in the universe."

"Hush! I shall not answer."

"Do, my dear; you must. In sober truth, Essie, what is the use of being alive, if I may not communicate with you? 'Tis a foolish price at which to buy a few more hours of breath."

Esther made no reply, not because she was resolved to be silent, but because she seemed to have nothing to say. One fact had possession of her mind, insistently pressing for a recognition of its reality, which she was but slowly yielding it. The fact that very soon Molly would be gone, and she would never have her again. A very young person would not have realised it at all, but Esther had lived long enough to know the meaning of the word "never." She shed no tears, there would be plenty of time for tears afterwards; she sat looking at Molly and holding her hand.

"How I hate the Liffey!" cried Molly, after a pause. "When I was a little girl and lay awake here at night, I used to like to hear it; it seemed like somebody there. I used to like to think of it, rushing along to Dublin all night, just the same as in the day. Now I protest I sometimes fancy 'tis the death of me. If I get through this bout, Hess, will you come to the Bath next spring? I believe you have used up all your excuses for not coming; besides, husbanding my fortune so well as we do, I may go in spite of your teeth."

"I will go anywhere you choose, Moll, from America to Constantinople."

"Obliging girl!" returned Molly with a bright smile. "Ah, you don't perceive I am better, but I am. Yet I won't be malicious, but will take you no further than London."

"O, not London!" cried Esther, forgetting for a moment that all this was but fancy.

"Yes, certainly London! Dear, chamingr London! 'Tis mighty perverse of you to have such a spite against it. Sure if we spent some unpleasant months there, we spent many more pleasant ones. O Hess, I

should love to walk in the Mall again, some fine spring day about noon! 'Twould be like old times, yet so diverting to see the new modes and the reigning toasts, that was brats in the nursery when you and I was in their shoes. Sure I trust their gallants have found some new oaths, for the old ones was very stale even in our day."

"They were good enough to break, and no doubt serve the same purpose well enough still."

"I dare say we should look pretty odd, in our Dublin modes, if we were to walk among 'em. Frank must be in London by now, but *he* will observe nothing. If I were not so much better to-night, I should ask you to be sure and tell Frank what a regard I have for him. But I shall get over this and see him again, and wish to tell him myself, and—certainly not be able to do so. I believe some malicious fairy stood godmother to him, and ordained that he should be full of amiable feelings and forbidden to express them, or to listen to any such feelings expressed to him by others. I find the spell work powerfully against me when I would show him kindness."

"It can be of no consequence, Molly, since he is as perfectly sensible of our sincere friendship for him as we are of his for us. You and I, my dear, don't often protest our attachment to each other."

"No, Essie, no, my dear love; not often—only sometimes. To-night for instance. Come and lie on the bed here by me, and kiss me good-night."

The bed was a large one in which they were accustomed to sleep together, and Esther did as she was bidden to do. Molly put a thin little arm around her sister's neck.

"I have always loved you, every minute of my life, Hess," she said. "Good-night."

They kissed each other, and when Molly was asleep, Esther too fell suddenly into the deep slumber of exhaustion.

It was morning before old Ann came in to relieve Esther's watch. In the grey early light she saw the two sisters lying on the bed, and at first thought them both asleep; but when she looked nearer she saw that Molly was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

CONDOLENCES and congratulations are both, for obvious reasons, apt to fall short of the mark or to overshoot it. Many kind-hearted people came and sat round Miss Vanhomrigh's parlour, clothed in their decent black, and tried not to appreciate too keenly the excellence of her cake and wine, while they expressed their sincere sorrow at her bereavement. But in great loves, as in great thoughts or deeds, men and women must usually accept their solitude. It is only a minority who are capable of such, and of these again only a minority light on the individuals that have power to sound the depths of their emotions. Had Molly been Ginckel in female form, though in that form his follies could never have risen to the height of crimes, yet it is certain that the loss sustained by Miss Vanhomrigh could have been readily appraised by every cousin in Dublin. As it was, her proud and solitary spirit, rendered solitary partly by the "long disease" of another and less benignant love, shrunk morbidly from the kind if superficial sympathy shown by her circle of acquaintances. There was one, only one, among them who knew just how and why she sorrowed. It was no selfish imprudence that brought Swift to Cellbridge oftener than usual that summer. He who was always prompt to succour and comfort the afflicted, wherever he found them, could not have turned his back upon the grief of his "little Hesskin;" especially since it was a grief in which he claimed a share. Moll had been in his eyes "a girl of infinite value," as he had said in that quick note with which he had answered the announcement of her death, saying no more than that, except that he could give no comfort to Essie, for he himself wanted comfort. This partial renewal of the old companionship would have been pure happiness to Swift, had he not been

more alive to its danger than before. In the course of the journeys which he took in July and August, the long lonely rides and the many wet days in-doors, he thought much and anxiously of Missessy. He had not been many days back in Dublin before he rode over to Cellbridge, but instead of turning to the left when he had crossed the bridge over the Liffey, he turned to the right and trotted up the village street, towards the gates of the big brand-new house in which the Conollys were just installing themselves. He found Mrs. Conolly in her great pillared hall, washing her most cherished pieces of china before putting them into a glass cupboard, while a young man in shirt-sleeves sat on the top of a ladder, polishing a bit of old armour which was to be hung upon the wall. Mrs. Conolly was enjoying all the delights of thoroughly arranging her house, even to that of being tired—which was quite an experience to her—and welcomed her visitor with her usual stately geniality, untempered by the least feeling that he was inopportune.

"I would not, sir, be so superfluous as to present to you my guest, Mr. Mordaunt," she said, "but that you can scarcely have expected to meet him here—or there," glancing up the ladder with a smile.

"Mordaunt?" repeated Swift, puzzled for a moment; then—"O, ay, to be sure," and he bowed to the former Mr. Earle, who, returning the bow somewhat awkwardly from his perch, made haste to descend.

"I have had the honour to know another Mordaunt these dozen years, sir," continued Swift, "and was never yet surprised to see him anywhere, except where I might have naturally expected to see him. You resemble him, Mr. Mordaunt. But in this case I understood from Miss Vanhomrigh that Mrs. Conolly had hospitably received you."

"Ay, and so have received something better than an angel unawares—a handy man," said Mrs. Conolly. "If the compliment were great enough, I would say Mr. Mordaunt was the handiest man in Dublin."

Francis, who was now in his coat, made Madam

Conolly a low bow ; for at Lord Peterborough's he had been at some pains to rub the rust of the Plantations off his manners.

"Madam," he replied, "I may earn my salt, but can never do enough to earn your most obliging hospitality. If it had been offered for my own sake, I trust I should not have had the conscience to accept of it."

He was thinking to himself : "So here is the cause of Essie's determination not to stay dinner."

"Miss Vanhomrigh has but just left us. I wonder you did not meet her," said Mrs. Conolly addressing the Dean.

"I love to muse when I ride, and may have passed without observing her," he answered.

This assumption of indifference was perhaps mere diplomacy on Swift's part, but it irritated Francis just sufficiently to make him carry out at once a resolution he had formed before returning to Ireland.

"What, Mr. Dean, in the street of Cellbridge ?" he asked with an ironic smile. "Why, at this time of day you can't but observe a mongrel cur should it chance to walk there. Miss Vanhomrigh must be still in the park. Let us go find her, sir, for I believe we can do nothing so civil to Mrs. Conolly as to rid her of our company."

Mrs. Conolly made a faint attempt to detain them, but seeing that, for some reason she did not understand, Mr. Mordaunt wished to be alone with the Dean, she let them go, with an admonition to be back for dinner. Swift's first quick impulse was one of revolt against the kind of force which this young man was daring to put on his movements, but he quickly conquered it. He asked himself whether he was or was not truly solicitous for Missessy's welfare, and willing also to share with another his own difficult unauthorized responsibility for her. As he silently descended the steps from the front door he took off his hat, as though to cool his brow, heated with riding ; but in fact he was breathing a short habitual prayer, that he might be enabled to govern his fierce

and haughty temper, and conduct himself as a Christian man. It was the more necessary because he was conscious of something unfriendly, resistant to his power in Essie's cousin, "little Master," as he was used to call him.

"Well, sir?" he said, replacing his hat, "I presume you have somewhat to say to me."

"I have," returned Francis slowly, combating an inclination to be afraid. "Will you walk towards the river, sir?"

"Wherever you please, young gentleman."

So they paced side by side. Before them sparkled a curve of the Liffey, its border of burdocks and rushes showing green against the yellow August meadows beyond, where the cattle lay chewing the cud in the broad sunshine. Behind rose the blue broken ridge of the Dublin mountains.

"You can doubtless guess, sir," said Francis after a pause, "the reasons that have prevented my visiting Cellbridge earlier in the year."

"I imagine you, Mr. Mordaunt, to be of necessity very much governed by Lord Peterborough's wishes. Besides, you have very just reasons for avoiding the eyes of your kinsmen in Dublin."

"You are right, Mr. Dean; yet those were not altogether my reasons for staying away till Mrs. Conolly was able, as she was before very obligingly willing, to receive me."

"No?" returned Swift, seating himself on the stump of a large felled tree, whilst Francis leaned against the bole.

"I earnestly desired to come to my Cousin Vanhomrigh's from the moment I found her to be left alone, sir, but in her solitary condition we feared my presence in her house would give rise to a scandal."

"So it would, sir, so it would."

"Yet if I am not her nearest male relation, I am the one on whom she naturally most depends, and who have the best right to take on me the office of a brother."

"A man of sense, sir, will perceive the absurdity

of your situation, but men of sense are so few 'tis useless to consider 'em. I counsel you to remain with Mrs. Conolly."

"You mistake my meaning, Mr. Dean," replied Francis with a shade of impatience. "'Tis one more personal to yourself. I would say, that I hold myself excused from impertinence in asking you, sir, to do your best endeavours to persuade my cousin not to continue in this solitary condition."

"I have several times entreated her to take a female cousin to live with her," returned Swift, also somewhat impatiently.

"Impossible!" ejaculated Francis, with heartfelt sincerity, for he was better acquainted with the family than was Swift. "No, she must quit this place."

"She must quit this island," cried Swift; "I have told her so. Yet whither shall she go?"

"To her Cousin Purvis at Twickenham."

"What? To a bed-ridden old woman, most like in her dotage?" asked the Dean with a grimace. "Sure poor Miss Essie has had her fill of nurse-tending."

"You have the means to make her choose it, sir—at least to influence her choice," Francis corrected himself hastily.

"How so, young gentleman?"

"By solemnly declaring to her on your word of honour, Mr. Dean, that this is the last visit she shall receive from you while she continues in this place." It was spoken significantly, and Swift gave an exclamation of anger, which he however instantly repressed, and in a few minutes spoke with cold stubbornness. For he was not going to be hurried into resolutions by this jackanapes.

"You would have me take singular and discourteous means to persuade Miss Vanhomrigh to a life very disgusting to a young woman. No, sir, I cannot promise you to do that."

"But if the alternative were marriage, what would you do?" questioned Francis, with a kind of reluctant deliberateness. It was detestably like asking his wife at the hands of a rival, but he endeavoured to console

himself by the consciousness that his real object was to force an explanation between Swift and Esther.

"That, Mr. Mordaunt, is a question which I have already had before me," returned the Dean gravely. "There are few persons I should counsel to marry, but taking into consideration Miss Vanhomrigh's solitary condition and her fortune, I believe it would be for her happiness to marry a man she could esteem and reasonably like."

"I may trust you to counsel her in that sense, sir?"

"You may, sir."

"And yet, Mr. Dean," Francis broke out with irrepressible bitterness, "it is certain such a man would scarcely think St. George's Channel a sufficient barrier between you and his wife."

Swift flushed haughtily and for a moment lifted his awful look to his opponent's frowning face; then remembering his resolution, he spoke more gently than before.

"I forgive your reflections on me, sir, for you are still young, and the young are often censorious—they are also sometimes mistaken. At all events the gentleman to whom I would point is my very particular friend and hath already asked my good offices in the matter. I have not moved in it till now, as I thought it indecent to speak of marrying and giving in marriage with your cousin Mary so lately dead, but as you are naturally anxious to see Miss Vanhomrigh's affairs settled before you go back to America, I will press the matter on."

Francis' love was as unselfish as a woman's, and with a little time in which to consider it, he could have reconciled himself to anything that was for Esther's happiness; but the unexpected manner in which Swift had sprung the new rival upon him was too much for the old Adam within him. He turned a shade pale and gripped a knot in the fallen bole on which his hand rested.

"Who is this man?" he asked.

"That is my secret, sir," returned Swift, smiling. "Yet I do not mind telling you he is a scholar and a gentleman, not without some modest means of his

own and certain of good preferment—for he is in orders."

"I might have guessed as much," returned Francis with a short laugh; "who but a parson would have——"

He was going to say "asked your intercession," but it struck him that he himself had gone perilously near doing so.

"Would have—what, sir?" asked Swift drily.

"Could possibly find favour in Miss Vanhomrigh's eyes. She has a singular liking for parsons."

"That was not what you meant to say, Mr. Mordaunt," replied Swift smiling and rising from his seat. "Perhaps you meant Miss Vanhomrigh was destined to have none but parsons for her lovers. But she has now a fortune to attract more dangerous admirers."

"That was not my meaning, Mr. Dean," rejoined Francis, following him as he walked slowly along the river-bank. "Gad! 'tis not only parsons that know how to value Miss Vanhomrigh. As to common fortune-hunters, I'll trust her discretion not to be chasted by 'em."

"Faith, young gentleman," said the Dean looking round at Francis with a not unkindly but melancholy smile, "you play your part of the brother somewhat too hotly. Are you in love with Miss Essie?"

He kept his eyes fixed on the young man with a still mild but penetrating and authoritative look, and Francis reddening, answered slowly, as though the words were drawn out of him by some magnetic force rather than voluntarily uttered.

"I cannot tell; but I shall esteem myself very happy if I can win her for my wife."

"And being her husband," rejoined Swift, "purpose to be jealous of an old sick deaf parson that she hath had a kindness for. Pshaw, my poor lad! You are in love. Why do you protest 'you cannot tell' if it be so?"

"Because," answered Francis with a vehemence born of anger and confusion at having betrayed to an enemy a secret never hinted to a friend, "because I cannot. If to be in love means to be willing to do

any injury to a lady, and cause every ill report of her rather than give up the enjoyment of her company, why then, M Dean, I for one am not in love."

"Neither am I, sir," replied Swift readily, suspecting Francis of shooting random shots at him, but honestly convinced there was no weak place in his conscience where they could stick, "and am heartily with you in thinking scorn of the tender passion. But women, you know, like it, and therefore I will not flatter you, Mr. Mordaunt, by affirming that Miss Vanhomrigh will prefer your reasonable liking to Dr. —— my young friend's warmer sentiments. Besides, 'tis a great matter for a lady to travel across the ocean, and perhaps one dark night lose her fine head of hair by some wild Indian's scalping-knife."

"I dare assure you, Mr. Dean, our Plantations have been as well cleared of wild Indians as Cellbridge of wild Irish," returned Francis proudly. "But 'twas far from my desire to speak of my own affairs. I was but desirous to know whether Miss Vanhomrigh's friends would have your support in urging her to leave Ireland."

"I have been the first to do so," Swift answered, "and shall continue my endeavours; unless indeed I can prevail with her to make the marriage I told you of, and which I must honestly say seems to me the most suitable one which offers. But here comes Tom Conolly. Let us go and meet him."

Their host came out of a wood a little ahead of them, with a gun on his shoulder, a brace of birds in his hand, and a golden-brown setter at his heels. He greeted the Dean from a distance heartily, not to say uproariously, and the two were soon in lively conversation on the dog's breed; for Swift took an interest in everything, and consequently knew a little about most things.

Swift stayed to dinner at the Conollys, but left the dining-parlour with Mrs. Conolly, alleging the incompatibility of his temperate habits with his host's.

"Moreover," he said as he closed the door behind him, "I must go make my howdees to poor Miss Van. Will you not walk to the village with me,

madam? The sun begins to strike less warm, and the air to-day is light and wholesome."

Madam Conolly assented, and as they strolled along the grass beside the carriage-road, he questioned her straitly about Dr. Winter and his courtship, to hear that, though persistent, it had so far ended in nothing.

"Well, at any rate you will not allow the savage to carry her off to his wigwam, will you, Madam Conolly? Heavens! I shudder to think of anything so valuable as Miss Essie exposed to the accidents of the American wilderness."

"Savage, Mr. Dean? What do you mean? Oh, Mr. Mordaunt. I deny him to be a savage, but no matter. He is not a lover of Miss Vanhomrigh's nor of any one else's, I should imagine."

"No, nor ever will be," returned Swift with inconsistent disgust. "He may be built like London Bridge, of wood and stone or of iron and steel, for all I know. Yet he must furnish his wigwam like other folks. Find him a squaw for it quick, Madam Conolly, a red-headed Irishwoman that will carry piccaninnies on her back as naturally as a peat-basket. Don't let him carry off Miss Essie."

And he would say no more about it.

"I knew you would come," cried Esther, while Swift was still coming along the garden path. "See, everything is in readiness."

She stood under a beech-tree on the river bank, leaning on a spade, and pointed to a young laurel in a wheelbarrow at her side. It had long been Vanessa's custom to plant a laurel every time her Cadenus came to honour her summer bower by the Liffey, and there was quite a grove of them now between the garden path and the river.

"What a pit have you digged!" said Swift, standing on the path; "I can't imagine, Missessy, how you that's a model of indolence when I would have you walk or ride for your health's sake, can delve like Cain—or Abel, was it? It may have been Satan for aught you care—for the better comfort of a vegetable."

"A body must value himself much more than I can that 'll run three times upstairs for his lungs, and as many down for his liver, jog along the Strand and back for his head and spend an hour in tedious company for his spleen. That's you, Mr. Dean."

And she laughed a clear girlish laugh that showed her white teeth as she flung aside her leather gloves and came towards him through the dappled shadows of the trees.

"Yet 'tis fortunate for me you choose to ride for your head's sake, else should I see you the seldomer. How glad I am to see you, Cadenus!"

She stretched out her two hands to him, and he kissed one beautiful hand somewhat lingeringly. It was a little hard that just to-day her cheek must bloom as delicately, her hair and eyes shine as brightly, as ten years ago in Windsor Park.

"No, child," he said, "but if there were not reasons against it you would see me oftener."

"I knew you were coming to-day. I often think you are coming—'tis all I have to think of now. But to-day I felt such a certainty of happiness that even Cadenus had not the heart to disappoint me."

"You know how your friend spends his days, Essie. Cathedral services and Chapters, beggars and tenants, and all the rest of the scoundrel rout of the Liberties round his neck, public affairs and printers plucking at his gown, and now, though he says it that shouldn't, half Dublin hat in hand to him, and even the Castle bidding for his support and fain to soothe his resentment."

They had turned and were strolling side by side along the familiar path to the bower.

"I know," she returned. "'Tis not my judgment that complains, 'tis my heart that cannot always avoid it. But there's no one so proud and rejoiced as I to see the world fast coming to its place, at your feet. Even your enemies acknowledge you for a great man now, Cadenus."

They reached the narrow ancient foot-bridge, by which on many pleasant summer days like this they two had crossed the river, and passing through the

picturesque ivied gateway, high on its worn stone steps, turned their sauntering feet by the shady bank towards the bower. Swift did not care for the picturesque, but it came into his head, as he wrenched open the rusty iron gate, to wonder how soon "the Bridge and the Bower" would be but another of those scenes in the Masque of Memory, which would often pass before his mental vision in the enforced leisure of his long journeys on horseback. He came down the steps slowly, with bent head, while Essie watched him from below, radiant with joy and pride. For she was schooling herself to be content with the glimpses of happiness that his brief visits brought her, and existing from one to the other in a state of quiescence, something like a hibernating animal. She was no longer actively miserable, only not quite alive unless he was there or had written.

"Lord, how my wits do go a-wool-gathering!" said Swift at length. "What was we talking of? Oh, of what a great man I am grown, to be sure. Ay, 'tis true I have even more sincere admirers than when 'twas thought I had my hand in the Lord Treasurer's pocket. What of that, little Hess? 'Tis a foolish world that thinks scorn of us when we are yet in the flower of our genius, and waits till we're chap-fallen dotards to do us honour. Why, I was worthy of much more honour thirty years since, my dear, and would have repaid it with a general benevolence, but now the world has too long turned its ragged back on me to make me forget that by this display of its gold-laced waistcoat. But I did not come hither to talk of myself. Why do you always make me talk of myself, Sirrah Hess?"

"Because 'tis so engaging a theme, Cadenus. I am not thoroughly acquainted with you yet, and may meet any day with Cadenus the 100th, the one I have not seen. I hope he is an agreeable fellow, and not at all terrible."

"Silly! Silly, I say! I did not come to talk about myself, and I'll not do't. 'Tis of you I would be talking."

"No, no!" she cried hastily. "That were to talk

of stark naught, or, worse still, of the spleen. You tell me you take infinite pains to fly the spleen and be merry. That's what I shall try to do to-day. We'll have coffee in the bower."

And she hummed to some tune of her own—

"A fig for partridges and quails,
Ye dainties, I know nothing of ye,
But on the highest mount in Wales
Would rather choose to drink my coffee."

Swift smiled, recognising his own doggerel. Esther's favourite haunt, which she called the bower, was hollowed out in the steep rocky bank of the Liffey, reached by rough steps and furnished only with a stone seat. It was roofed by the spreading lower boughs of a stunted oak, and to the steep bank on either side clung a thicket of thorn-bushes, dipping their own branches and the trails of dark ivy with which they were overgrown into the rushing water below. For the bed of the river fell somewhat steeply here, and broke the full stream into tiny cataracts, that sent it yet more swiftly rushing on its way. It swirled giddily below the bower, in a narrow channel between the rocky banks and a small island. The willows of the island almost shut out the view of the sloping opposite shore, but to the right of them there was just visible a breadth of bluer stiller water, and a thicket of emerald green burdock-leaves and rushes and pink willow-herb and yellow ragwort, bright above in the sunshine, and almost brighter in their tremulous reflections below.

They sat down on the stone bench, where a book or two lay awaiting them, but did not read. Essie, who had thrust loosely into her black kerchief a spray of white roses and a few crimson carnations, took them out, smelt them, and then arranged them more firmly in her bosom. Then leaning forward with her hands clasped round one knee, she looked at Swift.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

"I was thinking," he returned, "how romantic a bower is here, and that 'tis pity its romantic nymph

should have no shepherd to bring hither but one that would make an owl laugh. I am in hopes you may have been here with Dr. Winter, since I introduced him to the place. Come, you sly girl, have not you and he visited it since?"

"Why, no, Cadenus, nor was I best pleased at your bringing him to it."

"But he has been often here, Miss Essie. For that I'll vouch."

"He visited me at one time pretty often, usually with Madam Conolly, but of late I—I do not see him."

"You blush, sirrah. What's this? You'll not see him because you begin to perceive he is paying you his addresses?"

"Madam Conolly would have me to believe so, sir, but I cannot tell; we females are apt to be too hasty in such matters. Yet sure if the tale runs that way at tea-tables, I were best avoid the gentleman."

"Lord, what a coil about a poor honest gentleman that pays you his addresses! Faith, Miss Essie, this is not kind to our good Winter, to treat him like a rake."

"Sure, Cadenus, you would not have me a coquette. If he do not value me my conduct can signify little to him, but if he should have a particular regard for me, why—you see I'll not credit him with a *belle passion* for the *beaux yeux de ma cassette*—why, then, am I not kind to your friend?"

Esther was looking at the point of her own foot as she spoke. Had she been looking at Swift she would have observed a certain hardening of his expression, as he hardened his heart to carry out the resolution he had already made, in which his conversation with Francis had confirmed him.

"By no means. You are unkind to Winter and, what more nearly affects me, you are unkind to yourself, miss. Yes, you are vastly ill-judged. Why will you not marry Dr. Winter?"

Esther loosed her hands from her knee.

"Do not jest this way, Cadenus," she said.

"I do not jest," he replied almost sternly. "I

speak to you as a father or a brother would do, whose affairs called him away from you. I advise you to accept an offer of marriage from this excellent young man, should he still purpose making you one."

Esther rose to her feet slowly. Her cheeks and lips were pale.

"You—you—seriously advise me to marry Dr. Winter?" she stammered, looking at him.

"Indeed, Missessy, I very earnestly advise you to do so!"

She started away the few steps that divided the stone seat from the edge of the rock, and stood there with her back turned to him, her left hand clasping the horizontal branch of a thorn-tree, while her right picked a few ivy-leaves off it one by one.

"This is another guess matter from Dr. Price's business," he continued after a pause. "Price was not to be compared to Winter, either in his genius or in his person. Besides, that was some years back. And pardon my candour, Hesskinage, though Cadenus wears a pair of spectacles that make Vanessa to him everlastingly twenty, the world begins to accuse her of being an old maid."

Esther, still leaning on the tree, turned towards him.

"And yet," she said in a low voice, answering his earlier remark, "I have never concealed that I love you."

"You write me a deal of nonsense, when you are splenetic, Missessy, but I value it not a penny. 'Tis true, as you once wrote me, I have sometimes wished you devout, that you might bestow your enthusiasm on Heaven, that's less incommoded by such things than a miserable sinner. But in truth I reckon such sentiments to be of too little importance, either to God or man, to be given weight in deciding the fate of one for whom I have so much regard. When you have been a year or two well occupied with the cares of matrimony, you will blush to remember you once made a rout about a trifle which folks call, forsooth, 'Love.'"

She looked at him with hollow eyes and a strange smile.

"A trifle?" she repeated slowly. "Well, it may be so; you are oftenest right. But, Cadenus, if it be so, you should pity me the more that I have spoiled my life for a trifle."

"Pooh, Hesskinage, I'll not admit it spoiled at all, and certainly not for so foolish a cause, though in truth, with your fortune and your wit and your person, you might have made a more considerable figure in the world had you chosen. 'Tis your splenetic disposition that's to blame."

"My disposition is some way to blame, I do not question."

"I remember for example you would always despise and detest the converse of the world, whereas the philosopher despises and finds diversion in it. Then you had once some taste for display, and I would chide you for loving to have two footmen at your chair and a smart dress on your back; but since you might honestly allow yourself such indulgences, with female perversity you have ceased to care for 'em. There's but one misfortune you can boast, and that's poor Molkin's death, with her long illness, that made you a perpetual nurse-tender. 'Tis true I have always been of opinion that you would be happier in England than here. For my part I cannot think why you have stayed in this scoundrel island."

"You cannot think, Cadenus?" Esther burst out. "Oh, but you know. You know I can't live without seeing you."

"I used to tell you, Hess," he said sternly, "that if you would return to England I would visit you there, and we should be easier together than 'tis possible to be among these prying people. Now I tell you solemnly that this is the last time I will visit you here, unless 'tis to find you ready packed for your voyage across the Channel, or ready dressed for your wedding."

"You desire me then to marry Dr. Winter?"

"I do, Essie. I am confident you would make him an excellent wife, and though there's plenty of women that are rendered miserable by a parcel of squalling brats—I know women that detest brats as

much as I do myself—yet you are just the kind to be never so happy as when you've a dozen little masters and misses of your own to look to. I desire you to marry Winter, because he has a sincere regard for you, and is such a husband as you are lucky to get."

Esther had pulled some petals from her white roses, and was curling and crushing them in her hand.

"There's but one reason against it," she said with increasing vehemence, "and that is that I love you."

Swift had like herself grown pale and haggard as they talked. He shrugged his shoulders and made no reply. She cut a pattern with her thumb-nail in a white rose petal, then lifting her eyes said with lips that trembled so much they could scarcely frame the words:

"You want me to do a wicked thing."

He sighed impatiently.

"This is not reasonable, Essie."

"Reasonable! I am to lie to God and man, and for what reason? That you may be the easier rid of me."

"You are very unjust, child. You know my experience of the world hath long convinced me that marriage is better founded on a reasonable liking than on what is called Love, since 'tis in the nature of that passion to last but a little time."

Esther leaned back against the branch behind her and laughed; but not the girlish laugh with which she had rallied him scarcely half an hour before.

"Ha, ha! Cadenus—you must pardon my laughing—but really you are too monstrously diverting. Last but a little time! Ha, ha! This is exquisite!" And there was another peal of laughter.

Swift flushed and fixed on her his awful look, but for once the thunderbolt fell unmarked.

"Good God!" she cried, not laughing now; "what do you call a little time? Twelve years? Twelve years of torture, Cadenus? Oh, if you had spent 'em as I have, you'd think 'em a thousand!"

"I fear 'tis your disposition to torment yourself, Governor Huff," he returned with forced mildness.

"And I cannot take the blame of that. I was used to say you and the Liffey was of the same temper; you never murmured but sometimes roared. Yet I never knew you rage for much more than fifteen minutes together, and should say your wrath had now but five minutes to burn. Shall we be silent for five minutes by my watch," and he drew the watch somewhat laboriously out of a remote pocket, "in hopes it may be quenched when I speak again?"

"I will do anything you please—except marry Dr. Winter," she replied; but without obeying the gesture by which he invited her to be seated, she turned from him, while he took up a book which lay on the bench.

It was a fatal five minutes which she spent staring into the green and silvery depths of the willows of the island below, and the brown waters swirling under them. A crowd of dark and bitter feelings, which had for years been held down, silent and formless in the depths of her heart, rose up now and took shape. They were clamorous and not to be denied. When the five minutes were ended:

"Come now," he said, with the air of a kind parent speaking to an excited child, "what do you complain of?"

"Of my own madness," she returned without looking round. "Yes, Cadenus, as you say, my youth has slipped through my fingers. And youth, as you love to remind us, is the only good money we women have got with which to buy ourselves a share in the happiness of this world. O, what a vile and senseless prodigal have I been! How have I squandered mine! I have bought nothing, nothing with it—no, not so much as one happy day to look back upon."

"Hush, hush, child!" cried Swift, pained and impressed at the bitterness with which she spoke. "This is raving. You have had much to be thankful for."

"I have," she returned quickly. "I was better endowed by Providence than many that have prospered well enough. I had, even you'll allow, more

sense than some ; but one error—one miserable folly ! —Heavens, what a ruin has it made ! Why, 'tis the bare truth that there's not a more wretched woman alive than I. One that had bought with her honour a little base felicity would at least have had something for her bargain. I have had nothing, absolutely nothing. All torture—all wretchedness ! I have not deserved to suffer so much, Cadenus." And with a gesture of despair she turned once more to the branch of the thorn-tree, leaned her arms on it, and hiding her face in them wept bitterly.

Swift was shocked and distressed at her agitation, although it never occurred to him to suppose that her words represented the truth, even approximately. He was silent a little, and then he said :

"Hesskin, it distresses me infinitely to see you in such a state of despondency. You have been too long alone here and have a sick head, as I have sometimes. Go away, my poor Hesskin, go among your friends."

"Where shall I be less alone than here?" she replied, struggling with her tears. "Where are my friends? I have no friends but you, and you are not a true friend to me!"

Swift started with mingled pain, indignation and amazement.

"Essie, I forgive you," he said, "as you forgave me once when I had a bad head and talked against my best friends. Another might not so easily forgive it. In remembrance of that day, I promised you a faithful friendship so long as we both should live, and I have kept my promise."

"It was not like that you promised it," she returned wistfully, with a sob still in her voice. "You said you loved me better than any one else in the world. O Cadenus, was that true?"

"'Tis a question I disdain to answer, Governor Huff," he replied angrily, for his conscience here began to stir. "I ask you in reply, have you kept your promise to be content with friendship, and abjure the follies of Love?"

"Did I promise so?" she asked, and drew her

hand across her forehead and sighed wearily. 'Then I promised more than I could perform. Had your friendship meant all that it seemed to mean, 'tis very like I should not have been content."

"I visited you but too constantly, when you was first in Dublin, Missessy, and you was never satisfied."

"No, Cadenus, I believe nothing would have satisfied me—but what I could not have."

"Then you acknowledge yourself an unreasonable woman and a promise-breaker?"

"Anything you please," she answered, sighing again. "What does it matter? 'Tis all ancient history. And yet," she added timidly, plucking at the carnation in her bosom, "will you forgive me for asking again, Cadenus? 'Tis not of your feeling now I would make requisition. But tell me sincerely, was it true that I was dearer to you than any one eight years ago? You said so that day."

Swift went even paler than before. His singularly vivid memory brought back to him but too clearly that scene in the Wantage fields and even his own feelings at the time.

"It was, Essie," he said solemnly. "May God forgive me!"

"I am glad. But why do you say that?" She fixed her widening eyes on him and spoke in a very low frightened: voice "Was it that—was there——?"

She was about to ask some question, the answer to which would practically tell her whether another woman had had a prior claim on him—a question she would not have dared to ask but for her promise to Molly, not forgotten though unfulfilled.

But before she had framed it, he suddenly put up his finger to his lips and frowned warningly. Then speaking in a loud indifferent voice:

"I think, Missessy, I shall best answer your question by reading Lord Clarendon's account of the matter, which, I apprehend, we shall find in one of these volumes. If not I must e'en fetch it for you from the Book-room. Let me see—volumes 3, 4, and 5."

And he took up the books. Esther hastily seated herself by his side, and began to turn over some pages, while listening to the tap of heels and rustle of a noisy petticoat above. In another minute the heels and the petticoat flounced down the steep steps to the bower, almost landing their owner on her nose at the Dean's feet.

"La, Cousin! Han't I given you a jump? I was sure you'd never hear me coming. I always do move like a mouse. Lud, I'm frightened to death to be so near the water. What a nerve you have, my dear! How do you do, Dean? Sure you look bloomingly."

And Miss Stone sat down between the Dean and Miss Vanhomrigh, much incommoding them with her hooped petticoat.

CHAPTER V.

The Dean was the last person in the world to be pleased with the impertinent familiarity of address which was Miss Stone's imitation of easy good manners. Yet on the whole he did not regret her arrival, as having hastily sent for his horse while he took a dish of coffee in the Book-room, he trotted homewards in the pleasant evening sunshine. For most of the way his road followed the curves of the Liffey. The hurrying river that swirled and foamed under the bower ran here less swiftly, mingling with its own coffee-brown colour the reflected tones of its banks. The unpollarded willows grew luxuriantly beside it. Here they tossed their tremulous, gleaming wealth of foliage against a background of dark woods, there drooped it across a great mill-wheel or down into the hurrying water. Every willow on the road between Lucan and Dublin was known to Swift, who was a lover and a planter of willows. To-day, however, such few points in the surrounding scenery as he otherwise usually observed claimed no share in his meditations. His natural

sensitiveness of disposition made it intolerably painful to him to see suffering, either mental or physical, and ready to do almost anything to relieve it. The same sensitiveness, by a common paradox, made him eager to fly from sight or knowledge of it. Besides, he had his own reasons for avoiding everything outside public matters which could tend to excite him. For thirty years he had bent the whole strength of his strong will to subduing an extreme nervous excitability which his pride had usually helped him to conceal from the world, but of which he himself was painfully aware. The first time he felt his reason totter under its stress, he had seen that the choice before him was not one between common self-government and common absence of it, but between sanity and madness; not immediate, but gradual and inevitable madness. From that time his whole struggle had been to achieve an existence of philosophic calm, in so far as that was compatible with the fulfilment of his legitimate ambitions, and the partial satisfaction of those affections which he had not merely in common with other men, but beyond them. He had been in a measure successful. The virulence and other defects of his pen may lend a touch of insanity to his writings in the eyes of a modern reader, but the contemporaries of his earlier days at least, saw nothing unusual in them but their power. He had been fortunate enough to find a woman who could both win and return his love, and yet agree to share his life but incompletely, her character and social circumstances combining to make her satisfied with her position so long as she was content with him. Thus it was years before he had cause to acknowledge that in avoiding marriage he had not avoided the difficulties and disturbances that are inseparable from all close human ties.

So long as he was in the presence of Esther's despair his sympathetic distress was greater than his annoyance at the stormy scene to which she had subjected him; but as he rode home by himself, annoyance was decidedly the uppermost feeling in his mind. In the most complex questions of conduct

there is usually a moment when there is something which it would be right and tolerably simple to do; but like other "tides in the affairs of men" it is apt to pass very quickly, and afterwards every course involves a certain amount of wrong. That moment was long past in the history of his relations with Esther Vanhomrigh. However he treated her, he never felt easy in his mind as to the wisdom, or the justice of his conduct. Yet he did not exactly reproach himself, for he justly considered that the chances had been a million to one that such a passion as Esther's for him was a madness as brief as it was violent and singular. He might, had he been other than he was, have apprehended the peculiar depth and fervour of her emotional nature, but he could not be expected to realise his own fascination, the brilliant mind, the endlessly varied character, the mingled charm and terror of his ways, which made all the world beside little and insipid to her who had once fallen under his spell.

"I am very unlucky," he said, spurring his horse into a canter, "she seemed to have sense enough once, but now—Gad, of us two she's by far the maddest. Heaven send us safe from womankind—except little Ppt. ! Ppt. is a true philosopher, and never stormed and wept at poor fond Rogue in all her dear little days, not even when he richly deserved it. I'll go see her at supper time and we'll be merry."

The twilight had fallen and the oil-lamps were twinkling when he rode into Dublin. Hastily changing his riding-dress, he left the Deanery by the garden door, and was about to call a passing hackney coach, when he remembered that the old man at the corner had been sick lately. He was an honest old man, who sold pies and never begged, and the Dean, who usually dedicated special economies to special charities, reserved for him all the sixpences he might have spent on hackney coaches, and did not spend. He was tired with his expedition to Cellbridge and in a hurry for Ppt. and her supper, but as the old man was sick, he must not drive in a coach. So he strode off down St. Nicolas Street to Ormonde's Quay,

dropping a sixpence in among the pies as he passed the corner of St. Patrick's.

When he reached the small house at Ormonde's Quay, he went upstairs to the parlour three steps at a time, and opening the door a little but remaining outside it, said, in a whining voice:

"Madams, good madams, here's a poor gentleman that has not tasted herrings these three nights. For the love of God, ladies, one little herring at three a penny."

"Why, that's Presto!" cried Mrs. Johnson.

"Pray now, come in or go out," she added, somewhat tartly; "you are putting Dingley and me in a deuce of a draught."

The two ladies had just sat down to supper.

"Herrings!" he cried triumphantly, shutting the door behind him.

"It does so happen that we have 'em to-night," returned Hetty, "though we have had much more delicate fare these three nights, if you had chosen to come. Ha'n't we, D. D?"

Dingley, who appeared to be drawing a complete fish's back-bone out of her mouth by some kind of jugglery, was naturally a full minute before answering:

"That we have, Dean. Besides, Hetty, you know we only have 'em to-night because that Mrs. O'Reilly is so very disappointing. And indeed 'tis quite a favour to get one of her fat partridges, but they can't be depended upon. I said to Mrs. O'Reilly only yesterday, when she was at the door with her basket—'Now, my good Mrs. O'Reilly,' I says——"

"O pray, pray, D. D.," cried Mrs. Johnson, "don't begin with your 'I says' and 'she says' till the next wet Midsummer day, when we shall have time to get to the end of 'em."

"Faith, I love a herring," said the Dean, sitting down opposite Mrs. Johnson at the small table; "But I admire at D. D. who eats 'em every night of her life, and don't yet know how to eat 'em like a Christian."

After twenty years he had still not given up hoping

to improve poor Dingley's manners, nor being irritated at his failure to do so.

"We don't eat 'em every night of our lives," retorted Ppt. "I wish you'd not make us and our housewifery the laughing-stock of Dublin. 'Tis too bad of you, Presto."

"Sure we never was so scurvy mean as you say, serving nothing for your supper but three herrings in a Delft plate," quoth Dingley, indignantly. "You know we have real chaney which you gave us yourself, Dean. I use it when Hetty's well enough to wash it, but she won't have me do't since I cracked the tureen, which was not my fault at all."

"Poor little dear Ppt.," said Swift gently, looking across the table and ignoring Dingley. "She must be very sick if she cannot take a jest. Does Presto make a laughing-stock of Stella? He thought he was always trying to make his poor jangling old lyre tuneable enough to do her honour."

"You have done me a very great honour," returned Ppt. holding her head high. "If others don't think so the more's their folly."

"Good girl!" said he reaching across the table to pat her hand. "That's the way to speak. Presto often thinks Ppt. the only reasonable woman that ever he knew. That's why he loves her and always will, as hope saved."

He smiled at her and she could not possibly have helped smiling back at him.

"But what ails you to-night, poor pretty Pet?" he asked. "You have ate nothing but bread for your supper. Go now and lie down on your couch and let Dingley, that's never sick, make you some broth."

Yes, Ppt. was ailing; she was generally ailing now, but the couch Presto had given her for her comfort, she considered too good to be used, and put away under holland in the best parlour. And she would not for worlds be so unmannerly as to leave the table before the rest of the company. When the frugal meal was over, Swift opened without remark the folding-doors that led into that solemn apartment, the best parlour, and pulled the holland

cover off the couch; then, suddenly catching up Hetty in his arms, he ran in and deposited her upon it.

"Ugh, you're heavy, Madam Pet!" he cried, shrugging his shoulders. "Yet not so heavy as you was. If you'll but promise me not to grow lean, I'll never again say you're fat—for indeed 'tis a lie. I hate skinny women like Dingley," he added in a lower voice.

Here Dingley, who was luckily somewhat deaf, followed with a cushion for Hetty's head, but he took it from her.

"Pray go to your own chair in the parlour, D. D.," he said. "I know 'tis the only thing you love. If you push it but a little back I can swear with a clear conscience I had my eye upon you the whole evening. 'Tis more than you can do for me, since in ten minutes yours will be shut."

"I shall not be asleep, if that's what you would say, Dean," returned Dingley, with dignity. I close my eyes to think the better." This dialogue had passed between the two an incalculable number of times.

Swift arranged the cushion under Hetty's head less awkwardly than might have been expected, sat down by her and kissed her hand five times; a kiss for every finger beginning at the thumb. She smiled faintly, but made no response. This was only as usual, for she was essentially undemonstrative, and such small endearments as passed between them had always been mostly on his side.

"I loathe Dingley," he said, when he had accomplished the five kisses. "I hate, I could cheerfully damn Dingley."

His voice was lowered so that his objurgations could not reach the ears of their innocent object.

Hetty laughed a little.

"Poor D.! I love her well enough—that is, as well as I could love any woman I was compelled to live with."

"You are not compelled to live with her," returned Swift eagerly. "We can do well enough now without her money."

"'Tis not a matter of money," replied Hetty. "Even were it so, 'twould not be just to throw off D.D. so soon as we could spare her money. She could not live without ours, and I believe she would be ill without my chidings; they're like letting blood to her."

"Unkind Dallah! You think of Dingley and not of Presto, whose comfort is quite spoiled by her. When the debt on the Deanery is cleared, I will make a debt on D.D. I will pay her to go."

"You will only have to pay some one else to come, and hate her just as much when she is there," she replied. "Besides, Presto, we are at Dingley's mercy. She has of necessity shared our secrets."

"No, none of importance," he answered, meaning that she had known nothing of the marriage.

"I know not what you call important," returned Hetty coldly. "She has known much more of our intimacy than any one besides ourselves, and though she herself must perforce believe it innocent, if she be angry with us she will talk, and the world will say she was our dupe."

"A fig for the world! You wasn't used to trouble for what the world said when you was younger, Madam Pet."

"No, indeed, I did not," she cried. "But I cannot help troubling when such things happen."

"What things, dear goose?" asked he, taking up her fan, and fanning her with it. "I know there's some envious chit of sixteen been saying you'll never see five-and-thirty again—for even Envy would never guess your age—and wondering what your Grattans and Fords and Delanys can see in an old maid. Pish!" And he tapped her lightly on the cheek with the fan.

"No, Presto; I don't think your chit of sixteen like to be troubled with envy of me. 'Tis not that. Something vastly unpleasant has happened. But you're going to spend to-morrow at Delville, you say? Ask dear good Delany about it. He'll tell you what it is."

"Why is Delany to know more of Ppt.'s affairs

than Pdfr. ? Tell me yourself, Ppt., I insist. 'Tis some trifle, I'll warrant, that that fool Delany has hatched out to look important over."

"Dr. Delany is no fool, Presto, as you know well, and the matter may seem a trifle to you, but 'tis both sad and mortifying to me. But I'll not tell you."

"Ah, but you shall—you must. How can you fancy anything that gives his de' char' pretty Pet uneasiness can be indifferent to the Fond Rogue? Pray try and think kindly of Presto, who thinks so kindly of you."

"Oh, well, since you insist." She paused and went on reluctantly. "I went this morning to pay my wedding visit to Sophia Walls—Smith I should say. You know Sophy always was a favourite of mine when she was quite a little miss, though Lord knows I detest most children, especially girls. They showed me into the dining-parlour and kept me drumming with my heels for twenty minutes, and then down comes Delany, who happened to be in the house. And what do you think he came to tell me? Sophy, if you please, was not permitted to come, and Mrs. Walls was too ashamed. So 'twas he very good-naturedly undertook to do Mr. Smith's dirty work, lest the man himself should do it, and be more insulting than was necessary. For he came, Presto, to tell me that Mr. Smith had desired his wife not to receive visits from me."

"Infernal, insolent puppy!" cried Presto indignantly.

"Oh, he was kind enough to admit I might be virtuous," continued Ppt., calm but bitter. "But he seems to have heard something or other about you and me, and decrees that his Sophia's friends must be, like King Somebody's wife, above suspicion. Mrs. Walls is sincerely sorry, poor woman ; 'tis none of her fault, nor Sophy's either."

"I am grieved that you should lose your friend, who was a good girl, and grieved too that she should have tied herself to a pretending, censorious fool. I'll not call that a trifle. But as to disturbing our-

selves because the fellow reflects upon our conduct, we should be very foolish to do that, dear Dallah. I've heard tell he was ignorant enough at the University, though here be sets up for a fine scholar, and most like his virtue too's one of those new brooms that sweeps a bit too clean."

"I'll not affect more indifference than I feel," returned Hetty. "'Tis to my own forgetting disposition that I chiefly look for comfort."

"Sure Ppt. cannot think it Presto's fault," cried Swift, surprised and nettled at her coldness. "What has he not suffered for the sake of discretion? Yes, and often was discreet in spite of Ppt. And never mentioned her to his oldest friend but with infinite precautions."

"I told you I had no wish to talk of the matter," said Hetty, beginning to rise from her couch. "But Presto cannot expect me to be as careless and ignorant of the world as I was twenty years since."

This unpleasant incident had also reminded her of what she oftenest contrived to forget; namely, that she had not received the absolute and unswerving devotion which she had once expected, and which might have compensated her for some social disadvantages. But she kept that reflection to herself.

The agitations of the day had been almost too much for Swift's equanimity, and now the peaceful evening he had promised himself at Ormonde's Quay was proving quite the reverse.

A dark flush overspread his face, and he clutched the arms of his chair.

"By heavens!" he cried, in a low voice of bitter passion, "this insolent hypocrite shall rue the day he made an enemy of me! I'll make him smart for't, I'll make him roar again. Never fear, Ppt., but we'll have our revenge on him. But that"—here he leaned forward and waved his hand in the direction of Hetty, who was sitting at the foot of the couch,—"that's not what madam here wants. No, she wants to play mistress at the Deanery, to hold her public days, and to strut swingingly up the Cathedral to the Dean's pew with Patrick carrying her prayer-book. She

wants all the world to be making their curtseys to Madam Swift. Once she loved Presto, but now 'tis the world she loves."

There was a certain ill-natured and distorted truth in this which did not make it the pleasanter for poor Hetty.

"I'll not talk with you when you are in this mood, sir," said she indignantly. "When have I said a word on which you can put this construction? This is some fit of madness on you."

Swift fell back in his chair, and his flush faded to a vivid pallor.

"Madness!" he groaned. "Ay, 'twas madness to believe a woman's word when she said she cared not whether the world knew of her marriage; she only cared to be my wife before God and the Church. Tell me, do you whisper your gossip, the poor Dean's mad—mad?"

He was clasping his trembling hands across his eyes, endeavouring to calm his excitement. She had never before seen him lose his self-control, and her surprise almost overpowered her indignation. He was scrupulously temperate, but to-night he must surely have departed from his strict rule.

"Presto," she said, rising to her feet, "I don't know what you're talking about, and I fear you don't know yourself. Sure you have dined too well somewhere."

He was too proud to accept the accusation and too prudent to deny it, for it afforded an explanation for his unwonted outburst. He remained silent with his hand still over his eyes.

"Where did you dine, Presto?"

"Good-night, Madam Ppt. I am not well. I am going home."

Hetty knew not whether she was pleased or sorry to conclude he had dined with Miss Vanhomrigh. She was apt, rightly or wrongly, to trace his unamiable moods to that pernicious influence. Now she considered she had a definite complaint to make against Miss Vanhomrigh, and before morning had turned most of her indignation into that channel.

As Swift walked along Ormonde's Quay in the direction of the Deanery, he struck the cobble-stones furiously with his stick. He was angry with himself and every one else.

"Confound women!" he muttered. "If I could begin life again, on my soul I'd never speak to one. Ppt. is the best of them, but I was an ass when I gave her rights over me."

To acknowledge his marriage now, after all this while, was so difficult and would give rise to so much scandal, and as to taking a wife to live in his house and accommodating himself to a domestic life, it was more repugnant to him than ever. Above all there was his secret. Heaven forbid that it should be in the hands of two women! He sometimes wondered that he so little repented having confided it to Essie, though her impulsive temperament made her less likely to keep a secret than Hetty Johnson. He could not reasonably explain his greater confidence in her, but its source lay in his instinctive faith in her more supreme and perfect love for him. Ppt. loved him as well as she knew how, as well as most people knew how, but Essie could love better than that. As he passed over the dark, dirty, hurrying Liffey, that was hastening to bear the refuse of the town to the sea, he almost wished himself a stick or a straw to be seized and borne away by the water, that came flowing swiftly down from the Bower, and swiftly past Ormonde's Quay; to be borne away and tossed out at length on the wide fresh lonely sea, far from purified from all contact with humanity.

A kind of fair was being held in the long, narrow St. Nicolas Street that evening. It was at the best a malodorous street, the lower stories of its crumbling houses open to the pavement and full of second-hand clothes and other wares. The feeble oil-lamps that swung over these established shops were to-night reinforced by the flaring torches of itinerant vendors. In their fitful glare a crowd of dirty, ragged people pressed about from stall to stall, chattering, yelling, laughing over their bargains and their play. High above the torches and the confused movement of the

street, and beyond its dark vanishing line of gables, the Cathedral spire stood silent, pointing up to the blue gulf of heaven, to the quiet stars.

With his eyes raised to this, the Dean pushed hastily on, bestowing as little attention as possible on the crowd, the "drove of Yahoos," as he called them to himself in bitter disgust; though he could not quite overlook certain elvish children, who boldly pulled at his gown, and women who called out a "Good-night to you, your Riverence," or a "God bless you, Mr. Dane," as he passed.

No, he would not go to Delville to-morrow. He would let them suppose he had gone, but he would spend the day riding out along the strand; perhaps dine at Howth Castle, perhaps nowhere.

Next morning he awoke calmed and refreshed by sleep, but with the uncomfortable feeling of a child who had gone to bed naughty and unrepentant. He wrote an affectionate, apologetic note to Ppt. inquiring after her health, begging her not to trouble about that list she was to copy for him, and telling her he meant to be out of Dublin till the evening. Then he despatched some Cathedral business, mounted his horse, and presently was cantering along the shore of the bay, meeting with delight the fresh breeze from the sea, that glittered and gloomed far out to the eastward, under the changeful morning sky.

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as the Dean had left the book-room at Cellbridge and started on his homeward ride, Miss Stone, whom he had remorselessly snubbed, began to shake out the draggled feathers of her self-esteem and take her revenge. She had no intention of trampling on Esther's susceptibilities in the process; like most people who say unpardonable things, she simply never thought of her auditor except as an audience. The supreme necessity for her was to minister with words

to her own vanity or resentment. She would have been amazed, but, it is to be feared, more offended than grieved, had she learned that she was generally considered malicious, and that wherever she went she left behind her rankling wounds.

"My dear Essie," she said, the roundness and prominence of her eyes becoming more marked than usual, "do you know, if I was you, I would not receive visits from single gentlemen without I had a lady here. 'Tis true you are not young, yet scarce old enough to live alone. Dr. Swift too is an elderly man—he shows his years now, though in London I remember he looked young for 'em—elderly, but *such* a man!"

"The Dean of St. Patrick's is a very old friend of mine, cousin, as you must be aware."

"Friend, my dear girl! Why, 'tis generally admitted he treated you exceedingly ill, and sure we all admired your spirit in coming out here and avoiding his company, so soon as you found how matters stood."

"I came out here, cousin, when my principal law-business was settled and when I could afford to live here."

"Sure you don't mean to tell me you never heard of his amour with Mrs. Johnson? A very witty woman, and handsome still, they say, but of shocking low birth. However, 'tis said he has married her."

"His friends cannot suspect him of an intrigue and know nothing of a marriage. Methinks, Anna, you have too good a memory for stale scandals."

"Stale! Why, there's always something new about the Dean. Cousin Annesley's own woman that's sister to Mrs. Walls' maid—you'll acknowledge the Walls are friends of his—she says the Archdeacon and all his family are in a terrible taking because their new son-in-law from England threatens to shut the door in Mrs. Johnson's face, and speaks strongly against the Dean. But I hear that Dr. Delany—who's a great admirer of this Mrs. Johnson—a strange sort of woman to be having admirers at her age!—Delany more than hints she's Madam Swift, if the truth were known. And he's a friend now, an't he?"

"I am not acquainted with Dr. Delany," returned Essie, shortly.

Indeed, the good Delany, in his enthusiastic friendship for Mrs. Johnson, was a somewhat bitter partisan, and had avoided being introduced to one whom he believed to have been a source of grief to her, and whom he was willing to consider responsible for certain of his admired Dean's shortcomings.

"If you have no advice to offer me except that I should attend to the tattle of servants and other common folk, and decline the visits of my oldest friend—why, cousin, you had better not waste breath on me," she added.

Anna had long pursued the project of becoming a regular inmate of Cousin Vanhomrigh's house, for now Molly's keen eyes and mocking tongue were removed, it would be, she thought, very comfortable. It somewhat flurried her to perceive that she had irritated her cousin, whom she was used to pronounce of a phlegmatic disposition.

"Lord, Essie," she said, "don't be huffed! 'Tis a difficult matter for a young woman to live alone; but I must say I think you no worse off than when you had poor Molly. You always was much the more sober-minded and discreet of the two; I was your friend from the first, and frequently defended you when my mamma reflected on your reading, and would say 'twas better to be a bit of a reader than a giddy painted thing like your sister, poor creature—who was certainly heavily chastened in this life, and I hope has found peace in another."

"Cousin Anna," cried Essie, trembling with mingled feelings, "there was a time when I was in spirits enough to be diverted by such observations as yours. Ten years ago Moll and I were vastly diverted by the pleasant notion you and Sarah had got of making yourselves agreeable to a couple of sisters by backbiting one to the other. I remember Moll carrying the jest yet further, by praising you and Sarah to each other. For my part, even then, I sometimes found such manners too base and disgusting to laugh at 'em. But now, now when my heart's yet

bleeding from the loss of my dear girl, you come and think to flatter me by your dull censure of her whose excellence was ever my joy and delight, of her I had the happiness to love. Why, 'tis not common decency. I have defended you too, Anna; I have often said you had more good nature than appeared, but I promise you I'll never say so again. I tell you plainly I detest your conduct. Heavens, what a heart must you bear!"

And here the passion of tears, which she had stopped in mid course in the Bower, returned on her, and rushing from the room she left Miss Stone to her reflections—or rather her stupefaction. Anna had never heard such plain speaking as this since she parted from her own sister, and it is to be feared that Essie's speech, though plain, was less addressed to her particular faculties than Sarah's was wont to be. She really could not see what she had said that was so very dreadful. She had not alluded to the family scandal, though of course she had thought of it, for her mind was of the kind where such rubbish lies heaped, the most ancient and the newest jostling each other like Roman potsherds and Britannia metal teapots in the depths of a city river. Stupefaction having given way to indignation, and Cousin Vanhomrigh not having re-appeared, she set forth to return on foot to the place whence she had come, where she could not resist telling the tale of her own discomfiture to ears not wholly sympathetic.

Meantime Essie, having locked both the parlour-doors, lay there face downwards on Molly's couch in a paroxysm of sobs the physical convulsion of which made her almost unconscious of their cause, or rather causes. When it was over, she had promised herself solemnly on her knees to keep her promise to Molly, not only in the letter but in the spirit. She would insist on Cadenus telling her whether he was or was not married, or otherwise bound by ties nearer and dearer than he had acknowledged, to this Mrs. Johnson. If so, she would leave Ireland, and not endeavour to forget him—for that was impossible—but endeavour to allow him to forget

her, which she was compelled to believe he would find only too easy. She was to spend the next day in Dublin on business connected with her property, and Francis was to accompany her. She would leave him later in the day, when the Dean was likely to be at home, and go ask her plain momentous question.

The twilight was beginning to fall as Essie approached the Deanery on the day following the Dean's visit to Cellbridge. She might have reached it earlier, but on various pretexts she had put off her visit till the last possible moment. It had been her invariable custom to call there with due ceremony, having her old man-servant with her to announce her arrival by a pompous double knock at the great door. But the Dean had frequently let her out by his garden-door, and as this happened to be standing open, she went in by it, too intent on her purpose to consider whether so informal an entrance would meet with his approval. From the garden she could see some one writing in the window of the library. Candles were already lighted in the room, and against their flame she saw the silhouette of a woman's head, which certainly did not belong to Mrs. Brent, the housekeeper. Her heart gave a great bound and then stood still; something told her that this was Mrs. Johnson. She stood for some minutes with her fascinated gaze fixed on the silhouette, bowed over a great book, and the quickly moving pen. Then turning round she was aware of some one else in the garden—a man in his shirt-sleeves, digging potatoes. Patrick had been left this task by his master that morning, and had postponed it till now.

"Is the Dean within, Patrick?" she asked.

"No, madam, he's gone to Delville. I hope I see your la'ship in good health."

"Purely, I thank you. Who is the lady in the library?"

"Sure, 'tis Mrs. Johnson, madam." And having said this, Patrick scratched his head and was penetrated with regret at not having lied.

"I wish to pay her my respects. Will you announce me, Patrick?"

He gave a comical look at his earth-stained clothes and hands.

"Sure, madam, she'd be afther calling me a dirty divil for gladiatoring round with the quality widout a dacent coat to my back."

"No matter, I will announce myself," replied Miss Vanhomrigh, and turned impulsively towards the house; it struck her that it was perhaps all the better that she should appear alone.

Hetty Johnson, with that native philosophy which had justly endeared her to her friend, had easily made up her mind to pass over the unpleasant incident of the preceding evening. This philosophy of hers perhaps owed something to the fact that Madam Ppt., in spite of her ailments, was an excellent sleeper. A good eight hours' sleep usually does its work in smoothing out the ruffled mind, as thoroughly as a good high tide, that smoothes out the teased and trampled sands of a watering-place, leaving there fresh stores of shining seaweed and wet shells for the children to gather. In token that she bore no malice against her friend, she had come to copy into his ledger his list of the poor people who were to receive badges, entitling them to beg within the Liberties, whence other beggars were henceforth to be excluded. A task which would be the more obviously a labour of love, because the Dean knew that Ppt. shrugged her graceful shoulders at this new-fangled arrangement, as at one of poor dear Presto's many odd fancies, which one must indulge because they were his. She had even said that had she lived within the Liberties, she would, upon her word, have laughed at his rules, and been a free-trader in beggars; for sure the poor wretches had all a right to get what they could, and she would not herself be near so charitable were it not for the number and the divertingness of the Dublin beggars. His official beggars would soon become as dull as beadles, and charm not a groat out of any one's pocket.

So Ppt. smiled at her own virtue, with a half-humorous and quite unpharisaical pleasure therein, as she finished her copy and wrote beneath it the date, and "Jonathan Swift," in a hand which other people

might think his, but which he would know. As she was forming the big "J" there came a knock at the door. She said "Come in," without raising her eyes, feeling sure it would be only Dingley or Mrs. Brent. The person came in, but did not advance into the room. When she had finished writing "Jonathan Swift," she looked up and saw the person standing by the door —a lady very tall and pale in the dim light, and her long straight mourning cloak. The hood had half fallen back from her fair head, and her large dilated eyes were fixed on Mrs. Johnson with a strange, intent look that was almost beseeching in its anxiety.

"Mrs. Johnson—I have the honour to address?" she asked in a low voice, harmonious but somewhat tremulous.

Mrs. Johnson, whose mind moved quickly, did not waste much time in astonishment. She stood up under arms almost immediately.

"Your servant, madam," she replied, holding her head up proudly on her long neck, and returning the intruder's look with one more cold and keen. "Your visit is doubtless to the Dean. He is abroad, and is not expected home till late."

"It was meant for him, yet, madam, I'd as lief it were to you," returned Miss Vanhomrigh, nervously grasping her own cloak.

"Pray, madam, be seated," said Mrs. Johnson, determined not to be justly accused of ill-breeding. "May I inquire the name of her who honours me with a visit?"

"Forgive me, madam, if I do not answer that question," replied Essie, her voice still tremulous. "Who I am matters not, so you will but believe my intentions are honest, as indeed, madam, they are."

Mrs. Johnson bowed with a little look of disdain that passed unnoticed. Miss Vanhomrigh might not know her by sight, but she knew Miss Vanhomrigh; Dingley had once pointed out the young lady from Mrs. Stoyte's parlour window, and after that she had passed her once or twice in the streets of Dublin, and each time with a thrill of pain and repulsion that surprised herself. She had seen the visitor approaching

the house, but owing to the gathering dusk and her bad eyesight had concluded her to be a friend of Mrs. Brent's. But now she had no doubt who it was. Did the discreet Presto encourage Miss Vanhomrigh to enter his house thus, by a back way, alone and unannounced?—Surely not.

Miss Vanhomrigh seated herself on a hard settee and Mrs. Johnson on a chair at a little distance. So these two women, who had for ten years played so dire a part in each other's lives, met for the first time face to face. They could not but look at each other with painful interest. Esther saw before her a woman who had reached middle life, with a face still handsome enough, but cold and hard; not that face bright with sparkling gaiety or sly humour or cheerful benevolence, with which Hetty Johnson charmed her social circle. There was a sense in which the look Mrs. Johnson wore at that moment was encouraging to her rival, for it lent a new probability to Swift's assertion that he had been only like an elder brother to her, and that she was jealous over him, as sisters sometimes are over brothers. Essie, on the contrary, in the flush and simplicity of her emotion, looked unusually pretty, soft, and girlish.

"What have you to say to me, madam?" asked Mrs. Johnson, with an icy calm that was not assumed; for a deep and bitter coldness seemed to rise from some hidden depths in her heart and freeze her whole nature, as she looked at this young woman, who, it seemed to her, had striven in the insolence of youth, wealth and position to rob another, one older and less fortunately situated, of her only treasure; and for a time had succeeded, and thereby for ever lessened the treasure's worth.

"I know not," returned Essie, forgetful of forms, of all except the fulfilment of her purpose. "That is, I know what I would say. Mrs. Johnson, you are a very old friend, almost a sister to the Dean, are you not?"

"I am no sister nor otherwise related to him, madame," answered Hetty, wilfully misunderstanding the question. "But, as is well known to his friends,

he has been my kind protector and closest friend from my childhood till now."

"Then you must be well acquainted with his humour," returned Essie, "and aware 'tis a singular one. Oh, do not mistake me," she added quickly, as Hetty looked up with a slight frown; "I know, and—— Heavens! how do I honour his great, his generous disposition. Was never, sure, a heart so tender to his friends, so kind to the unfortunate, so staunch to every cause that he deems just and true. No, no! I do not speak in dispraise of him."

A faint flush came to Mrs. Johnson's marble cheek, and her soft dark eyes glowed under their black brows. Irritable and sarcastic as she constantly was, she did not know the sensation of violent anger, of a passion that swelled the veins and made hot, unmeasured words rush from the throbbing brain to the tongue. No doubt as a little child she had experienced it, but never as a mature woman. Now such anger rose within her, as Miss Vanhomrigh praised her own husband to her. But she controlled it.

"Madam," she said with studied calm, "I'll not affect to be made very proud by your commendations of the Dean, for you say but what his old friends have been saying these thirty or forty years. Yet 'tis perhaps as well I am here to listen to it rather than he, for though a divine, he is human, and the praises of so fine a young lady might make him vain."

Essie, absorbed in the difficulty of coming to her point, continued: "I praise him only because I cannot refrain from doing it—only because I hate to be forced to suspect a fault in him, and that fault—a want of candour. Madam, it seems you have known him well since he was a young man, tell me—on my honour I do not ask it idly—would he be likely to keep from you, from another, a secret that it would have been wiser, more just to tell them? I hate to think it possible, indeed I do."

"Madam," returned Mrs. Johnson, her voice trembling with anger, "excuse me, I am but a poor country-bred creature. It may be polite breeding would compel me to answer a question that to my

simplicity appears exceedingly strange, seeing that the Dean is, as you must be aware, my most valued friend and benefactor. Well, I make no pretensions to be a fine lady, and am therefore free to say I would not discuss the Dean's faults, whether real or fancied, with my oldest acquaintance, much less with a complete stranger like yourself."

"Oh, for God's sake!" cried Essie, in too deadly earnest to admit offence, "do hear me. As you are a Christian woman, madam, restrain your anger—I cannot think 'tis just—and listen to what I have to say. Pray do. It does concern you, though you may not think it."

Mrs. Johnson, impressed by the appeal, and ashamed of her passion, stood irresolute. She felt no fatal curiosity to hear the truth about Swift's relations to her rival, but, on the contrary, shrank from confidences that might be painful and could have no practical result. Perhaps the chief reason why it roused her wrath to hear Miss Vanhomrigh boldly accuse him of want of candour was because that was a trait in his character which she had been at pains to hide from herself, to explain away, since it had forced itself on her attention nine years ago. But Hetty Johnson was a good woman. Miss Vanhomrigh's manner of entrance and her immediate plunge into a subject of great delicacy had naturally both startled and shocked her; yet to give way to passion, to trample rudely on one who stood before her as a suppliant, though that one had wronged her, this Hetty could not do. Besides, there was something compelling in Esther's intensity of purpose.

"Madam," she said, speaking once more with composure, "you bid me as I am a Christian hear what you have to say. I am no enthusiast, yet Christian is a name I value, and I trust you do too, and that you do not make use of it for any vain or malicious purpose. But since my patience is of the shortest, and my friend Mrs. Dingle may at any moment join us, I beg you'll be brief. Sure, 'twere childish to make so much ado about such a question

as you have asked. Be plain. How does the Dean want candour?"

Essie raised her eyes, fixed them on Mrs. Johnson, and seemed about to speak, yet said nothing.

"What secret do you imagine he has to keep?" asked Hetty, with the impatience of pain.

Essie clasped her hands tightly together, and at length spoke falteringly and by a great effort.

"Most likely he has none—but I came hither to-day to ask him whether 'tis true what people say; whether he is a married man, or in any way bound—not free."

"Ah!" cried Hetty, and there was a pause. Then —"By what right, madam, would you have ventured to ask him such a question?"

"Tell me, tell me, can you answer it?" cried Essie.

"You have said it—I insist on learning your right, your motive before I answer," returned Hetty quickly.

"Madam," cried Essie, "I have no right—none that he would acknowledge, yet you will understand my motive, for you are a woman too! Give me a moment and I will try to make it clear to you."

Leaning with one arm over the side of the settee, and her handkerchief pressed to her lips, she paused, looking not at Mrs. Johnson, but away into the deepening twilight of the room; and so after uninterrupted silence she went on, but still intermittently—

"I have a friend, a kinswoman—I'll not tell you her name. When she was but sixteen years old the Dean took note of her; he commended her wit, and she had wit enough to be very proud of his praise. Years after that when he was in London—ah, you Dublin folk don't know yet how they sought after him in London!—he made a pastime of enlightening her folly, of teaching her to reason and distinguish. He that had the greatest and wittiest in the kingdom for his intimates, he condescended to be friends with her. Madam, you know him, gifted with what a happy genius, how charming in his benevolence to

those he loves, how various in—well, well, you know!"

Mrs. Johnson had stiffened in her chair as these praises of Swift came out slowly, and ended with a sigh.

"'Tis enough—'twas but natural," Essie resumed with an effort, her voice deepening and steadying, "that she should love him. She loved him, madam. She loves him still. Yes, you can easily imagine, she loves him still; for what wretched pigmies must the common run of men look beside that image that she perpetually carries in her mind!"

"And Dr. Swift? Has he returned her passion?"

Mrs. Johnson spoke with unnatural calm. She had been listening to Miss Vanhomrigh with part of her attention, but as she listened new and painful thoughts had passed through her mind. How if she had made a mistake in allowing her whole life to be strictly bounded by Swift's rules, and meantime another woman had trampled on them, rushed in and taken the kingdom for her own? It was terrible to await the answer to this question, and terrible also to be compelled to give it; for there was not even a plain truth to fall back upon. Pride, her own ever-sanguine thoughts, and the growing doubt whether this icy woman opposite her could ever have loved even Swift, made an affirmative tremble upon Essie's lips. But was it true? Would *he* admit it had ever been so? No; he would be angry at the imputation. And she had come hither scarcely at all for her own sake, but that she might at length behave with justice towards this woman, of whose position she had for years thought more than she had chosen to admit even to Molly, to whom she was now prepared to yield even her heart's blood. The struggle was short but sharp.

Then—"No," she said faintly.

Mrs. Johnson, who had leaned back in her chair, sat up again, and spoke after a pause.

"Then, madam, 'tis plain that, whether the Dean be married or single, this young lady should abandon at once her—her unfortunate passion."

A harder word had risen to her lips, but she sup-

pressed it. Like many just people, who have little to forgive themselves, Mrs. Johnson found it difficult to be generous, but she wished to be so.

"'Tis useless to persuade her," returned Essie, her head bowed and her eyes fixed on her own tightly-clasped hands. "Nothing can do 't except the knowledge that he is bound to another by some tie of love and honour superior to the tender friendship"—the phrase pricked Hetty like a pin, for she knew it—"that he has often avowed for her. Is he so bound? Oh, madam, pray do answer me freely, for, though I honour marriage, I am not so much the slave of the world's opinion as to regard no other tie between man and woman as deserving of consideration. Tell me, I implore you!"

She raised her eyes to Mrs. Johnson's, who met them with a white stern face and an imperious gesture that commanded her to pause. Presto had Ppt.'s word of honour that the fact of their marriage should never be hinted at. He had suggested last night that worldly motives were making her repent that promise. She would show him that at any rate she knew how to keep it.

"Madam," she said deliberately, "I know not what you would hint. The Dean is not a man to form any unlawful tie—you might have guessed as much. As to love, to the best of my belief—and you'll remember that I am his oldest friend—he has never once entertained that passion, not even at the age when few have the discretion to avoid it. The chief part of your question seems to be whether he is married. I can but say he has never told me so; but, on the contrary, often talked against marriage, especially the marriage of men advancing in years. I have answered you, madam, as well as I am able, and beg you'll excuse me. 'Tis full time I returned to my lodgings."

"You have concealed nothing from me? Are you sure you have told me everything?" asked Essie earnestly, rising from the sofa.

Hetty rose too.

"I have answered you, madam, to the utmost of my power and my short patience. I heard a friend

who is to walk home with me come into the house just now ; you really must excuse me. Will you wait the Dean here ? "

"No, no !" cried Essie, terrified. "Farewell, madam. I thank you for your patience, and ask your pardon for my singular conduct, which may well seem unpardonable."

She sighed, and drew her hood forward. Both ladies curtseyed, and Miss Vanhomrigh left the room, leaving the door wide open in her haste.

Hetty did not immediately follow her ; she sat down again. She seemed to have been sitting stone still for a long time, and certainly must have been so for several minutes, when a voice called her, low but clear.

"Mrs. Johnson."

Surely that woman was not still there ; yet it was her voice. Hetty did not immediately reply.

"Mrs. Johnson," it came again, louder and more insistent.

Hetty walked slowly and reluctantly to the open door. Yes, Miss Vanhomrigh was still there. She stood just under the large lantern that hung in the middle of the square hall, with its handsome paving of great black and white marble slabs. Her face was very pale, paler than it had been before, and the lantern cast the shadow of her hood across her eyes. It made them look almost black, yet they gleamed out of the shadow.

"Mrs. Johnson," she repeated. Hetty moved a little nearer, yet not much beyond the lintel of the door.

"Listen," she said, and her voice though not loud was very clear, and had a strength and ring of command in it that Hetty had not heard before ; "I am myself that woman, that most unhappy woman I spoke of. I appeal to you before God, as you hope for mercy, have mercy on me and on yourself ! Tell me the truth. Are you married to Dr. Swift ? "

Mrs. Johnson stood up white, transformed to stone, but with her eyes fronting that piercing gaze opposite, that seemed as though it would tear the heart out of

her bosom. At length she spoke, and was aware that a little tremor ran through her, but her enunciation was clear, haughty, deliberate.

"No, madam, I am not. You have asked too much. Go! Leave this house!" and she pointed to the door, which was open, as though her strange visitor had once already gone out. Then the black figure vanished silently again into the outer dusk, this time to return no more.

Yet even before it had gone, Hetty had turned her back on it. Never, never before in all her life, in which reason had ever controlled emotion, had she experienced or imagined such a struggle as that which had but now torn her bosom. She trembled and stretched out her hands for support, as though she had received a blow, and so going blindly back into the dim library, found herself sudddenly yet gently caught and supported in a man's arms.

"Dear, dearest Ppt.," whispered Swift's voice close to her ear. "'Twas worthy, 'twas noble. Madwoman! How durst she come here? Ah, I thought you would not lie, you that hate a lie! And then I heard you do 't—and all for Presto's sake. Dear, brave Ppt. How can he ever be sorry enough?"

"Let me go," she said faintly: "I am not well. Let me sit down." Then—"How did you come here?"

He seated himself by her on the settee, and took her irresponsive hand.

"When I came in, Mrs. Brent told me there was some one with you in the library; so I went in there," pointing to a door communicating with the dining-parlour. "But I heard nothing, so presently I opened the door softly and stole in. That was how it happened. I never meant to spy on Ppt., nor that moon-struck creature either. Heaven knows how she came hither; 'twas not at my invitation. But I am very glad I heard Ppt. tell her brave lie; else she would have kept the thing a secret, and never have allowed Pdfr. to know all her loyalty and goodness to him."

"Pray let Patrick order a coach," said Hetty; "I am not well. I wish to go to my lodgings."

"Poor dear Dallah! Let me go with you."

"No, no. Why should you? Dingley must be here somewhere. Pray call Patrick!"

And hurrying to the door again, Mrs. Johnson called out in a shrill, fretful voice, "Dingley, Dingley!" Dingley answered from the distance, and Swift coming meekly forth, shouted to Patrick in an opposite direction.

"You won't let me come?" he asked.

"You are very good to offer it; but Dingley will take care of me."

"May I come to supper?"

"Faith, if you choose to sup with Dingley and eat her tripe. I am sick, and going to bed."

"May I come in the morning?" he asked almost timidly.

"I thought, Presto, 'twas our rule not to meet of a morning. I see no reason why you should come before dinner. Mr. Ford has sent us a hare, so you had best dine with us to-morrow."

"Dear, poor Ppt.!" he said in a whisper, standing close to her, and looking down at her inscrutable face with wistful eyes; "she thinks it was my fault. It was not indeed—as hope saved, it was none of Presto's fault."

"Don't!" she cried, with a quick look of pain. "Why will you talk about it? Let us forget it as soon as we can. Ah, here's Dingley! D. D., I am sick—we must ride home."

Dingley was voluble in finding excuses for Hetty's sickness, which ranged from the bit of lobster she had eaten last week to the magpie they had seen in the Phœnix Park that afternoon. Having satisfied herself that the cause was found, her anxiety was allayed. Patrick had caught a coach close by, and the Dean helped the ladies in, vainly trying to win a glance from Ppt.'s averted eyes. When the coach had driven off he went back to the library, and finding his big ledger open where Hetty had been copying his list, he shut it to with a mighty bang; and as it banged, he cursed Miss Essie aloud.

CHAPTER VII.

Essie was very silent on the journey, as her light chaise—the horse was young and her coachman knew she loved fast going—flew across the Phœnix Park, and swung down the steep hill where the old road to Lucan dips to the banks of the river. It was dark except for the light of the chaise-lamps. Francis was leaning back in the opposite corner. Having addressed her once or twice and received no answer, at length, when they were far upon their road, he roused her by some remarks in the course of which he compared her unfavourably as a companion with a red Indian in a frost. Essie asked pardon humbly for her inattention. She might have alleged a headache, but small fibs did not come naturally to her, and in truth she was physically quite unaffected by her part in an interview that had shattered Mrs. Johnson. So she merely said that something had occurred in Dublin which pre-occupied her mind. Perhaps the darkness gave Francis courage.

"Essie," he said shortly; "Moll had confidence in me. 'Tis a pity you have none.'

"Now, Frank, how can you say that, when I show so much?"

"Yes, a very great deal. You tell me your money matters because you don't value 'em any more, and believe that I can save you trouble. That's your shrewdness, and shows no confidence except in mine."

"Well, I see you are still the old brat, never contented."

"Pardon me, I was never discontented without a cause. Do I complain of living in the American wilderness, as you folks at home call it? No, I like it, and so would you if you was there. 'Tis reasonable to complain when a man has a grievance that can be remedied, as mine can easily be. Sure I don't flatter myself in thinking there's no other relation you

have, male or female, you value as much as myself. How vastly well that sounds for me, to one that does not know!"

Essie could not help smiling.

"I am willing to allow as much," she replied.

"'Tis not a great deal," returned Francis drily, "when you can't abide the others. But Moll thought more of me than that, Hess; she asked me to stand to you in her place when she was gone."

"Nay, that's impossible, Frank!" cried Essie.

"You think I don't love you as much," he said.

"How should you, dear cousin?" she answered gently. "Yet you love me much better than I deserve."

They were silent a few minutes. Then—

"Essie," he said, "do you know that Moll sent for me to come home and take care of you?"

"No," she cried, with a start; "indeed I did not. I am very sorry for 't—I mean sorry you should have left your affairs and taken so long a journey on my account, when you can be of little service to me, except in so far as I am honestly glad and comforted to have you."

"I might perhaps be of service to you," he returned. "But you will not let me. You will not consider that we have known each other as well as brother and sister all the days of our lives, and that there's none who has so good reason to love and serve you as I. 'Twas not on account of your land or your fortune—matters with which she knew you well able to deal—that Molly begged me to stay with you."

"I know not what you would have," she murmured.

"I would not be forced to watch you sending good years after bad ones, and never a word said. For Heaven's sake, let there be no disguises between us, but tell me plainly whether you intend staying here and continuing the same mode of life. You know what I mean. But 'tis madness, and I'll not leave you to it—I'll hang first. Oh, I have a thousand things to say to you, Hess, and can't say 'em, and yet I will."

"Not now, Francis," she cried faintly, "wait a

little. I know not what I intend. I promise you shall hear my resolve, and even the reasons for 't, when 'tis made. But say no more on 't now. I can bear nothing more this evening."

"I am content with your word of honour that you'll put confidence in me. Indeed, there's none has so great a regard for you, Essie, if you'd but believe it."

And so they passed to indifferent topics.

Essie went to rest that night with a conscience, if not a heart, unburdened. She could not but believe Mrs. Johnson's solemn assertion that she was not married to Swift, but she did not feel very sure that she had got to the bottom of the matter. And now that the impulse which had taken her into Mrs. Johnson's presence was exhausted, she began to fear that Swift would be told of her proceedings, and be extremely angry with her. She lay awake half the night, thinking of what she could say to assuage his wrath. She decided to write to Mrs. Johnson and beg her to keep silence; but when the morning came she could not stoop to that. It was a warm, grey day, with a noise of distant thunder rolling about the Wexford mountains, and an occasional swift heavy shower racing across the garden. She wandered out between these brief storms, pretending to garden, and then about the house, pretending to look to household trifles, but all the time a heavy weight seemed to be on her head, and a yet heavier one, a weight of terror, on her heart. About noon, Francis came in to transact business, and they laid out ledgers and papers on the book-room table; but he complained that she was so inattentive she might as well not have been there. Before they had been long at work, she suddenly jumped up, and thrusting some papers into his hands, said to him with a startled face:—

"Take these into the next room. Pray go at once."

She had heard the sound of hasty hoofs approaching the house along the hard high-road. A moment after there came a loud knock at the front gate. Francis went reluctantly, and left the door of the dining

parlour ajar. He could not but guess whose was the heavy foot that immediately afterwards came striding into the house. Swift had flung his reins to the old man servant who opened the outer gate to him, and entering the house unannounced, burst into the book-room.

Essie faced him half leaning on the table, as white as a sheet and with terror legible on every line of her face. Two days ago she had wondered in jest what the hundredth Cadenus, the one she had not seen, was like; now she saw him. The awful look she had seen and dreaded before was mild compared to this, for it was not only a vision of black wrath that stood there frowning upon her, but something worse; something that cut into her heart, cold and sharp as a knife. It was, or seemed to be, Hate. An interminable minute the shape stood in the doorway, then making two strides forward, flung a sealed packet violently down on to the table. At the same instant Esther sunk on to her knees, as much because her trembling limbs refused to support her as for the purpose of supplication, and stretching out her hand, clutched him convulsively by the right arm, as he turned to go.

"Cadenus!" she would have shrieked; but nothing more was audible than a hoarse murmur that died in her throat.

"Cadenus!"

At the second attempt her lips framed the word; but the voice was a mere whisper.

He raised his left hand as though to loose her fingers from his sleeve, and loosening them herself, she let her arm drop to her side. In an instant he was gone. She heard the bang of the house-door and the outer gate, and then the hurrying hoofs of the big horse, just as she had heard them four minutes ago, only this time they were going instead of coming. When the last echo of the horse-hoofs had died away, Francis, listening in equal bewilderment both to the sounds and the silence of those few minutes, heard a strange cry—a long low moaning cry, less human than like that of some inarticulate suffering creature.

Yet it seemed to proceed from the book-room. He went in, and coming hastily round the corner of the open door, almost trod on Essie's hand. She had fallen face forwards on the ground, and the hand stretched out above her head held a torn wrapper, which seemed to have contained the sheaf of papers, that had slipped after her from the table, and lay strewn upon her body. Francis called her name, but there was no response, and on raising her head he saw she was perfectly unconscious.

Swift had once been used to scoff good-naturedly at Esther if she told him that she was sick ; but hers was that strange kind of good health which has a poor constitution behind it, and the sufferings and anxieties of the last few years had told upon it. For some days after her last interview, if so it could be called, with Swift, she kept her room and saw no one. When she reappeared, both Mrs. Conolly and Francis were startled at the change in her. To herself it appeared not so much that she was another person, as that she was dead ; a corpse that moved and spoke and even remembered, but to which some essential of life was lacking. It no more occurred to her that she could take up again that past existence of hers than it could have done if the grave lay between her and it. For years she had believed, at first rightly, afterwards mistakenly, that Swift loved her better than he dared allow. Time, circumstance, and, last but not least, the violence of her own passion had completely worn out his sentiment for her. The moment of awakening had come. She saw that her love was unreturned ; yet more, she believed that she had always been indifferent to her idol, and was now an object of hatred to him. Her twelve-years' passion, the torture and the inspiration of her life, fell dead, and with it died the greater part of herself.

For many days and nights following that first and last meeting of the two Esthers, the thoughts of each ran in much the same channel. Esther Johnson, for all her philosophy, was unable to refrain from bestowing a good deal of useless and painful reflection on

the disappointments and disadvantages of her connection with Swift, while the disaster and humiliation that had attended hers seemed to Esther Vanhomrigh, as she lay staring at the darkness night after night, to be branded on her flesh. Yet each one, entertaining the last of the common stock of lovers' delusions, said to herself that after all Swift was the only man she could ever have loved.

If in the night Essie tossed on her bed, or paced the room in a restless agony of thought, in the daytime a great apathy of body and mind had fallen upon her. Her constitutional indolence, no longer counteracted by strong interests, seemed all that was left of the old Esther. The autumn was cold and rainy, and she spent most of the day on the stool before the fire that had been her favourite seat, but the habitual book was no longer open before her, or if open, was unread. She never left the grounds, even to visit the few poor families whom she had found fit objects for her charity among an innumerable crowd of claimants. For, generally speaking, the dirt and untruthfulness and disorderliness of the Irish poor offended her more than their wit and shrewdness and *naïveté* amused her. Sometimes she would leave the fire and go out through the parlour window without any protection against damp and cold, as had always been her custom, and stroll aimlessly round the garden, or stand on the old bridge and watch the swollen Liffey tearing under the high arches, tumbling amid its yellow foam, dead leaves and mats of dry reeds and broken branches. She would go to the bower, too, and stand with a strange apathy in the very place, leaning on the very branch, where she had stood on that September day when she and Swift had last visited it together. The bower above and around and the island below, turned golden, and sheltering each other, kept their glory later than the meadow trees, which the stormy winds and rains stripped bare earlier than usual. But in time they too laid it by, and the slender yellow leaves of the willows, and the small fretted orange or red leaves of the thorns, were mingled in the stream and rushed on under the bridge,

or were heaped by the eddying river in its miniature bays and inlets. The russet foliage of the oak remained longer to roof in the bower; but the wind and rain moaned and pattered through it on to the rock below. Still if it did not actually rain, Essie continued to come thither in her black dress and thin kerchief, though week by week the full curves of her shape fell away and grew nearer to hollow leanness, and the pink of her cheeks was replaced by two spots of hard bright colour.

Meantime Francis, lost now to all thoughts of what might be said about it, hovered round her, putting shawls for her that she did not use and food on her plate that she would not eat, and inviting her to walks and rides she would not take, though she never failed to thank him for his care and remonstrate with him for losing his time with her. But something more was needed than this kind of care. If anything could have warmed the icy corpse of Esther back to life, it would have been a warm stream of human tenderness, flowing out perpetually towards her in expressions of love, in soft beguiling ways and instinctive adaptation to her moods. Her melancholy condition and loneliness, except for himself, made Francis more sensible than ever of his deep attachment to her, and he knew vaguely what she wanted, but he could not give it her. All his life up till now he had been accustomed, first as a matter of temperament, then as a matter of pride, to hide all that was warm and kind in him under a cold and unkind mask, and now in bitter helplessness he strove to alter himself and could not. A caressing word upon his lips sounded idiotic in his own ears and unnatural in hers. If love had burst into his life as something new, it might have altered all that; but his love for Esther was part of his old self, and to her less than to any one else could he be different.

To be passive and helpless in the face of a crisis was a new experience to him. But he dared not take any decided step, lest it should be a wrong one, and had Essie been capable of noticing anything, she must have noticed a transformation in him; for he

grew silent and almost humble. He never asked her about that strange apparition of Swift, for he had observed enough to be satisfied that it had signified a rupture between them. The papers which he had picked up from the floor and locked into her desk on the day when he had found her lying unconscious, were evidently letters of her own, and the thick fair curl that had fallen down among them had no doubt been cut years ago from her young head, with a *badinage* that had not wholly masked some underlying sentiment. The Dean had quitted the field; so far so good—but what a wreck had he left behind him!

After this state of things had lasted without any change for nearly four months, Francis at length behaved in a manner that he despised: he went and confided his wishes and difficulties, and Esther's melancholy condition to Mrs. Conolly. Mrs. Conolly had long had uneasy suspicions concerning Miss Vanhomrigh and the Dean, whom she was as willing as Francis could desire to credit with the whole blame of the matter. This was the secret of her anxiety to see Miss Vanhomrigh well married, for otherwise she was not one of that class of matrons who regard all the disengaged men and women of their acquaintance as so much marrying material. When Francis had told her his story in an embarrassed and unexpansive manner, yet with a sincerity of pain and anxiety which he could not disguise, and when she had amplified it by her own guesses and observations, she solemnly declared that her fancy could not have devised anything so good as this marriage, which, besides providing Miss Vanhomrigh with a good husband, would remove her far from the possibility of renewed intercourse with Swift, and from all that could recall to her the faults and the misfortunes of her youth.

"Describe to her your solitude, Mr. Mordaunt," she said, when Francis had declared for the tenth time that Essie had a regard for him, but that he despaired of persuading her to look upon him as a possible husband. "Describe to her the horrors and dangers of the American wilderness!"

"Danger! Nonsense!" interjected Francis.

"The absence of all that can make life agreeable," continued Mrs. Conolly; "and see if she'll not be eager to share all with you."

"What, madam? You would have me appeal to her pity?"

"Yes, Mr. Mordaunt, for her sake. I am certain she'll make you a good wife, for she's one of whom you may say that when she sets her hand to the plough she looks not back. Yet 'tis more for her sake than for the difference 'twill make to you in that savage—yes, I will call it savage—country, that I earnestly hope for this marriage. If you love her, lay pride on one side, and through her love if you can, but through her pity if you cannot, win her—for her own sake win her."

Francis put up his lip, and could not promise to do anything of the sort.

She went to see Miss Vanhomrigh with him a few days after, and found her on the terrace outside the summer parlour.

"What will you do when your cousin is gone?" she asked Essie, when Francis had stepped down into the garden for a minute. "Sure you'll not let him cross the seas alone and leave you here alone too. 'Twould be the foolishest thing."

"Would it not be foolisher, dear madam, to keep him here idle, and even in danger should he be recognised?"

"'Twould be madness. But there's no such reason why you should not accompany him."

"Why, Madam Conolly, you forget we are not in fact very nearly related. The good people in the Plantations would talk."

"I meant of course that you should marry him."

"Poor Francis! Would not that be a little unfair to him?"

"My dear, he wishes it," whispered Mrs. Conolly, pressing her hand as Francis rejoined them. And in a few minutes she took her leave.

"What were you saying to my cousin just now, madam?" asked Francis, as he handed her down the terrace steps.

"I was saying that you wished to marry her," replied Mrs. Conolly indifferently. Francis ejaculated something that did not seem expressive of gratitude.

"Lord! No thanks, I beg," said Mrs. Conolly, with a little smile. "Sure, 'twas not for your sake I did it, but for hers. I was convinced you'd never do it yourself."

"You take me for a timid man, Madam Conolly."

"By no means, but for a lover so half-hearted and cold that, were't not for the happy circumstance of your dwelling in America, I'd by no means desire a woman I valued to marry you."

She spoke partly in jest, but also partly in earnest. Francis reddened, but when he returned to Esther he was unusually pale. It was a mild December day, and she sat listlessly on the balustrade of the terrace, looking away over the river and the meadows to the blue Dublin mountains. Francis stood in front of her.

"Did you believe what Madam Conolly told you, Hess?" he asked.

She turned her eyes on him with a puzzled look.

"What was it?" she said. Mrs. Conolly's whispered information had made no impression upon her, and she was not thinking about it. Indeed, she could hardly be said to think of anything in those long days of brooding, and even at night her thoughts and feelings had ceased to be very clear and poignant, though fever and a hacking cough kept her awake.

"She told you I wished to marry you, and it is true. If she said that I loved you dearly, that was true also."

She still looked at him with that little puzzled contraction of the brows that was familiar to him.

"Mrs. Conolly cannot let me be," she said; "but indeed you need not listen to her, Francis. You have always made too much of the trifle of kindness you owe us. I do not wish to marry, and if I did, for you to marry me out of gratitude—why, 'twould be ridiculous."

"Good heavens, Hess!" he cried, coming nearer to her, "can't you believe that I love you?"

She sighed wearily, as one who is obliged to talk of what does not interest her.

"I know you do in reason, Frank," she answered. "But you don't want to marry me. Mrs. Conolly has been talking to you. Why can't she leave me alone?"

"Now listen to me, Essie," he said, standing up close to her and taking her hand. "Confound Mrs. Conolly; don't mention her again. Ten years ago I said to myself that I would get you for my wife, if ever I had a chance. Have I got a chance now, Hess? Do try and believe I love you."

"No, no; you can't," she whispered, turning pale.

"Hess, I can—I do."

She wrenched her hand from his grasp, for a moment roused from her apathy.

"You wouldn't if you knew," she moaned. "Not if you knew how I have spent myself in worshipping that man—oh, much worse!—how I grovelled at his feet, and he all the time hating me."

Francis stepped back and silenced her by a quick gesture.

"Hush," he said almost sternly, "never tell me a word of him! 'Tis folly, for you can say somewhat to give me pain, but nothing to alter my regard for you. For God's sake let all this be clean forgotten between us. There's new country waiting for you, Essie. You'll love it very well. There's little company there, but you never was fond of company, and there's plenty of work to be done, such as you was used to love. And I must tell you myself, since there's no one else to do it, that you will find yourself and me persons of consequence out there, and all the people coming to us for counsel and assistance from as many square miles of country as there are in Ulster and Leinster put together. You used to say you'd love to be somebody, Hess, and on my honour you may be a queen out there. Then 'tis such a wholesome air—not like this chill place; you'll soon lose your cough and be as strong as ever you was. 'Tis certain you'd do well to come with me, Hess—I can't take a 'No,'"

Her momentary agitation had passed away; she listened quietly with bowed head. She remained silent so for a minute or two after he had finished speaking, and he fancied his words had not been without effect. Then she looked up at him with a strange look, half dull, half sad, and shook her head slowly.

"'Tis too late," she said. "You are very good, Frank; once I should have liked your new country well enough." He cried out against her "too late," but she continued talking in a spiritless way, yet as one stating some plain fact. "Yes, it is too late, and I will tell you why. I dare be sworn you think there's no such thing as a broken heart; I was used myself to think it a bit of cant or ladies' vapours. I know better now, for my own heart is broken. It should not be so, I allow; I must be a poor weak creature for this to have happened. I see very well that what you say is wise as well as kind, and I should be very fortunate if I could do as you advise; but, my dear, 'tis of no manner of use. I am fit for nothing more in this world though I should be thirty or forty years in it, as I very well may be."

There was something dreadful in the dead calm of her speech and look; it almost carried conviction to Francis' unwilling mind, but he withstood the impression. Sitting down by her on the balustrade, he endeavoured to argue with her, but in vain. She only shook her head at his reasoning. At length he was reduced to silence and despair, when suddenly Mrs. Conolly's advice occurred to him. Must he appeal to her pity? Yes; for her own sake. So he made the last sacrifice of his pride, and pleaded with her to come for his sake, because if she did not his life would always be solitary—more solitary than she could imagine.

She smiled faintly.

"Not always, Frank. You are young for a man, and look at me—I am an old, old woman. Some day you will get a young wife, and live happy ever after."

He answered impatiently—

"Women seldom come my way, and when they

do they don't love me, nor I them. Besides, you know me, and with how cold a heart I am cursed, so that I never loved but very few persons in my life. There are just two alive now I love, and one is his Lordship, and t'other—well, that other I love incomparably more, and always shall do, so long as I live."

"I am sorry for you, Frank," she said, "and yet I am not. For I can't, however I try, be truly sorry about anything. I used to laugh at you when you was a boy, for thinking whenever you was sick that you was going to die, and now I am as foolish myself, for it seems to me that I am going to die."

He threw his arm around her, not caressingly, but to drag her into the house.

"Good God!" he cried; "you must leave this cursed climate, or 'twill kill you as it killed Molly."

"Ah," she said. "So you too think it killed Molly. I have sometimes thought so since she died. In that case 'twas my fault that she died, for 'twas my doing that we settled in Ireland; she never loved it very well."

They had by this time reached the glass doors into the parlour.

"Essie," he said solemnly, "if you continue to give way to such splenetic fancies, you will end a madwoman."

"I was a madwoman, Frank, for the best part of my life. 'Twould have been a mercy then to have sent me to Bedlam. But now I am quite sane, and know very well what I have been and what I am. Oh, Frank, you must be mad yourself if you really love me. Let us not talk of it any more."

But Francis, having once begun his wooing of Esther, carried it on with the energy and persistence that marked him in all his undertakings. In earlier days such obstinacy would have roused a rebellious temper in Esther, but "Governor Huff" was now dead and buried. She shed a few weary tears over the matter, and finally got her own way by partial yielding. He was to go away and leave her to think it over. In the spring, on his way back to America, he was to return to Cellbridge, and then perhaps—very likely, she would do as he wished.

So foolish a thing is the human heart that it was with a feeling of relief Esther watched the ship sail out of Dublin Bay, which bore away the only creature that loved her, except two old servants. She was glad to get back home and brood wholly undisturbed, even Mrs. Conolly having gone to Dublin. Soon after Christmas there came a heavy fall of snow and an iron frost that seemed as if it would never go. For weeks the roads were blocked and every village thrown upon its own resources. Neither news nor visitors came near the lonely house at Cellbridge. The black trees broke under the frozen snow, and their great branches lay across the garden paths or hung into the river, and caught as in a net the pieces of ice it brought down on its chill dark current. And sometimes Esther wandered out to the bridge, and watched the icy river or scattered food for the freezing birds, but oftener she sat idle by the fire. All the winter there was no change in her, except that every day she grew leaner, and coughed more, and suffered more pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Swift had recovered the "bad head" that had followed on his angry rupture with Esther Vanhomrigh, he expected to find a letter from her full of appeal and remonstrance, or at least reproach. He had fully made up his mind to return it unread, yet he was glad not to find it. Weeks went by, and still she made no sign. At length then his life was free from those continual claims which he could neither deny nor allow. He had hardly guessed how completely Esther's sympathy and admiration had ceased to compensate him for the worry and diversion of interest his connection with her caused him. He who prided himself justly on the faithfulness of his attachments was a little ashamed to think how this great friendship of his, that had once been but too warm, was now quite cold; a dead burden to be thrown out

of his life with a sigh of relief. But the fact must be acknowledged, with shame or without it; he was thankful to have shaken himself free from this ten-years' entanglement. He walked the streets with a lighter step, and gave more sugar-plums and half-pence to the children, and rallied the apple-women more good-naturedly than he had ever been known to do; and every one said how hearty the Dean was looking. Mrs. Johnson, too, was brilliant in spite of the bad winter. Since she would not let him speak to her on the subject, he had written her a letter asking her pardon a thousand times for the pain he had caused her, telling her that he was fully resolved never again to hold any communication with that poor crazed creature "that shall be nameless," and imploring her to exercise all her powers of forgetfulness on the matter. Hetty did not, never again could love him as she had once done, but she was neither analytical nor repining, and found another kind of happiness in his complete devotion to her; a devotion as tender as he had shown in the days of her youth, and much more respectful and unselfish. She was formed for society, and life became very pleasant to her as the increasing number of Swift's admirers and friends widened the circle of her own. He was no longer a lonely man in Dublin, except with the inevitable loneliness of his intellect and character. If it was beyond Mrs. Johnson's power to understand or genuinely care for many of his interests, there were others about him now to supply her deficiencies; young eager minds looking to him for inspiration. He threw off that winter in mere light-heartedness a dozen anonymous ballads, epigrams and broadsheets on trifling occasions, which have mostly disappeared with the trunks of a long-past generation of travellers. They served to keep his pen sharp for more serious warfare, as it was reported that the English Parliament intended before long to make a fresh attack on the liberties of Ireland, through the coinage. All patriotic eyes turned towards the great Dean, and he, like the war-house of his favourite Book of Job, scented the battle from afar and cried "Ha, ha!" at

the sound of the trumpet. For full six months he rejoiced in his freedom, and never so much as thought of Esther Vanhomrigh. At length the persistent black east winds had ceased to blow, and as he rode into the country, he noticed that the catkins and primroses were out in the hedges ; then he could not help thinking, and thinking kindly, of her who was used to have an unusual delight in the spring. Not that he wished to renew his intercourse with her, which he saw clearly now to have been disadvantageous to her as well as troublesome to himself, but he hoped she was gone over to England, since he had heard nothing of her this winter. There no doubt she was nursing Mrs. Purvis, and would soon inherit another fortune and marry some one ; perhaps "little Master," her cousin, who was an ugly, disagreeable fellow, but honest enough. These suppositions served as an anodyne to any little uneasiness of conscience that might have been caused by the recollection of his once esteemed and adored Missessy. The sunshine that had long been missing from the earth was very pleasant to feel, and his head seemed boiling with an unusual number of ideas as he trotted along, or smoked a surreptitious pipe in his library window-seat. The world was going so well with him that had he retained enough of his usual pessimism, he would have said something unfortunate must be about to happen.

One Sunday late in May, Patrick was dressing him for the Cathedral, and he was endeavouring to forget his amusement over the complete success of his last literary fraud, and attune his mind to the sacred function in which he was about to take part. Patrick was talking ; he always talked, and the Dean listened or not according to his humour. On this day he had not paid any attention to Patrick's discourse, till the name Vanhomrigh attracted his attention.

"Eh? H'm! What was that you was saying, you chatter pie?"

"Thunder and turf! His riverence gets hard of hearing! I was saying, your honour," and here Patrick raised his voice to a shout, "I met Miss Van-

homrigh's man in the town to-day, and he tould me his poor lady was mighty sick—bless her purty face! —and he afther fetching the doctor."

"Why, I thought she was gone to England."

"Sure she never went, your riverence. She's been in a mighty queer way all this year, it seems; near crazy they do say; and now, poor lady, she's in the article of death. 'Twas her own man told me so. Lord, Lord! And her such an illigant crayture, and such a fine spirited way wid her too!"

"Pooh, Patrick! You servants love to exaggerate. No doubt when I have a bad head you tell all the footmen of your acquaintance the poor Dean's in the article of death. Put my bands straight. Pshaw! I say Miss Vanhomrigh 'll live to a hundred! My hat, I say: the bell will be down and you still jabbering. I know not whose curse we bear—'tis certainly not the curse of Adam—when we must needs feed this pack of lying varlets."

And still muttering he went out.

But he could not banish from his mind this bit of news, probably false, since all Patrick's news was false, which he had heard. It pursued him through the cathedral service, and he kept wondering how far it was true while mechanically repeating the usual prayers. He found himself taking it more and more seriously, and giving way to a strange kind of horror, a something like remorse, although he knew of no just grounds for such a feeling. While he stood up in his stall in the choir listening to the anthem, which always bored him and to-day was unusually long, this feeling increased upon him, and he was conscious of a throbbing in the head and a general tension of the nerves, such as was often symptomatic of one of his attacks. The organ was playing very low, and one boy was singing with a pure but somewhat veiled soprano voice, inexpressive as a bird's and sounding thinly in the large crowded church. Suddenly, high and wild above the low booming of the organ and the thin trickle of song, there rung out a shriek—a woman's shriek of agony, at once hoarse and shrill. The sound gave him a terrible shock; he

leaned far out from his stall and looked down the aisle to the west end, whence the shriek appeared to have come, and there he saw a woman in a white dress wringing her hands and weeping wildly. He distinctly saw Esther Vanhomrigh. Forgetful of the anthem, the dignity of his office and the many eyes upon him, he left his place and stalked down the whole length of the cathedral. Many of the people had left their seats, and a little crowd was collected at the west end.

"Where is she?" asked the Dean sternly, scarcely lowering his voice. A verger, more decorous than his superior, pointed to a poor woman of the shop-keeping class, stout and elderly, who lay on the ground in convulsions, while a doctor, kneeling at her side, cut open her sleeve preparatory to bleeding her.

"Who shrieked and caused this tumult?"

"'Twas her, your reverence. Faith, the poor lady is in a strong fit and couldn't hinder herself, Mr. Dean."

"Ay, but the lady in white?"

No one had seen a lady in white, unless a child sitting on a bench outside the pews, who had jumped up to see what was the matter, could be considered a lady. The doors were closed, and, looking carefully round the church, he satisfied himself that there was no one present resembling Miss Vanhomrigh. The blood that horror had frozen in his veins flowed on with a leap; he blushed a dark red as he walked up the aisle more hastily than he had come down it, and regained his stall as the anthem was ended. What a trick had his short sight and his fancy combined to play him! It was ludicrous. He was in that excited condition when a very poor joke or no joke at all will sometimes strike a person as irresistibly funny. His demeanour during the service was as a rule punctiliously reverent, but when, immediately on reaching his seat, he kneeled down to join in the prayer for the King's Majesty, he could no longer restrain his amusement. He seldom felt any inclination to laugh aloud, but just on this occasion he could have made the

choir ring with his mirth. Fortunately he was able to moderate it to some extent, though not to stop it. As he kneeled with his face plunged in the voluminous folds of his sleeves, the curls of his peruke continued to tremble and his broad shoulders to shake and heave in a prolonged paroxysm of laughter which shocked himself; on account not of its cause, but of its impropriety in the sacred building. The canon sitting next to him, who was accustomed to hear him following the prayers in a whisper and joining loudly in the Amens, could not but observe his unusual demeanour. Knowing him to be a kind-hearted man, and supposing him to have gone to the other end of the cathedral with a view to assisting the sick person there, he took the Dean's emotion to be of an opposite nature to that which it really was. As the canon happened to be the only one of the chapter who understood that he had a great man for his dean, he took note of the little incident, and added it to his private collection of anecdotes, illustrating the compassionate nature of the most remorseless of satirists. It is fair to say that the rest were more genuine.

By the time the prayers were over he had recovered both from his untimely merriment and the disquieting effect of Patrick's bit of news. He would send a note to a cousin of Miss Vanhomrigh's in Dublin and ask after her, but in all probability it was some very slight complaint from which she was suffering. So he smiled with particular cheerfulness at Ppt. waiting for him as usual at the south door, just on the spot which he afterwards chose for her grave, and they walked over to the Deanery together; Dingley too must accompany them. He did not always postpone dinner till after the afternoon prayers, but today there were some gentlemen from a distance expected, and the dinner had been put late to suit their convenience. Before it was over he received a line from Miss Vanhomrigh's cousin, stating that she had been a little indisposed but that nothing had been heard of her for some weeks, and "no news is good news." Mrs. Johnson was rather tired and went home early, but the gentlemen lingered on

in the dining-room till late in the evening, not indeed drinking heavily, which the Dean did not permit, but enjoying a regale of coffee and conversation.

Dr. Sheridan was there, and he and Swift exchanged volleys of punning wit, such as now delights none but the writer of burlesques, but from which intelligent persons in those days contrived to extract amusement. The talk, however, was far from being all of such a nature, for Mr. Ford had just received a letter from Erasmus Lewis giving a detailed account of how the man Wood had bought from the K——'s mistress—the very sum paid was mentioned—the privilege of issuing a new copper coinage for Ireland; how it was to be much more debased than the English, even if this Wood fulfilled his contract honestly, and whereas in England the copper coinage was scarce more than a hundredth part of the currency, in Ireland it was proposed to make it as much as a quarter. Something of all this the audience knew, but their wrath rose as the details, some old and some fresh and some false or exaggerated, were marshalled before them. Dr. Winter, who was a mathematician, whipped out a piece of paper and speedily proved it would cost the country fifty thousand pounds.

"Why, sir," said a gentleman from Wexford, with an oath, "all the gold and silver in the country will immediately find its way into the pockets of landlords in England, and we that live on our own estates must be content with dirty stuff, which none that are not obliged will say 'thank you' for, and which will be worth nothing in exchange with the money of other countries."

"'Twill be the ruin of our commerce," cried another. "But that no doubt was Walpole's chief design in the matter."

"'Twas Sunderland sold the privilege to Kendal," interposed Delany.

"May be; but doubtless Walpole moved the fat Vrow to demand it," said Swift. "Ay, ay, wherever there's wickedness and corruption, you may take your oath Flimnap—— Walpole I mean's in it."

"Let's drink to his damnation. Pass the bottle!" cried Mr. Ford, and filled his glass.

"And to Wood's and the German hag's," added his neighbour, surveying the diminished contents of the bottle somewhat anxiously.

"If we must drink damnation to every one that's tarred with that brush, my cellar will not last it out, nor will there be lying room under my table for the fallen," said Swift drily. "But 'tis not persons, 'tis the system that's most damnable. The king's mistress has as good a right as the king's ministers to sell that which belongs to neither of 'em. How long are we to be treated like slaves? As long, I suppose, as we consent to it. What does it matter to us if this ironmonger coins his soul and body into halfpence for us, if we don't take 'em?"

"Well said!" cried several; "Mr. Dean, we'll beat Walpole yet."

"I fear 't will be a difficult undertaking," observed Delany, who was patriotic, but somewhat wanting in courage and enthusiasm.

"Difficult!" ejaculated the Dean. "Ay, there are plenty of men fancy an enterprise condemned as impossible when they have pronounced it to be difficult. If 'twere easy you'd not find me troubling to undertake it."

"How do you purpose to begin?" asked Winter.

The Dean shook his head and smiled.

"The oracle is dumb, Winter."

"I wish," said another, "there was some chance of Walpole coming soon to the gallows, and then I doubt we should find he had left as edifying a last speech and confession as the late lamented Elliston."

This was a notorious street-robber, executed about a year before, whose purported last dying speech and confession, wherein he declared himself to have denounced all his old associates, so that they might be proceeded against if they did not abandon their evil practices, had been circulated in Dublin, and had produced consternation among the criminal classes. But the better informed suspected the genuineness of

the Dying Speech and Confession, and even thought they could guess its real author.

"Then should we be as free of tyranny and corruption in Dublin, as we are now of street-robbery," said Delany with a smile.

"'Twas an excellent thought, whoever it belonged to, to print the rogue's confession," returned Swift gravely. "I'm told there's scarce been the least theft on the streets this twelvemonth."

"'Tis an odd thing, though, the fellow held so good a pen," said Winter slily; "I cannot help suspecting that if Walpole should attempt the same, their styles would be found to resemble each other surprisingly."

"Your riverence," interposed Patrick, in an agitated whisper, "there's a gintleman without that's afther seeing you on a matther of life and death, and there's no denying him at all, at all. Indeed, sir, he'll take no denial."

Swift had changed his seat immediately after dinner, in order to hob-nob more freely with Sheridan, and the door, which Patrick held wide open, was immediately behind him. The untimely visitor in his impatience had followed Patrick and stood but a little way back from the threshold of the room. The light from a sconce near fell on his face. Swift had not turned his head, but lifting his eyes as Patrick spoke, he met the stranger's eyes looking out at him from a mirror on the opposite wall. These eyes meeting his so unexpectedly, the apparition of that white stern face arising like a ghost opposite him in the midst of his festivity, startled and disturbed him as much as though it had been the ancient writing on the wall. He turned and made sure it really was Miss Vanhomrigh's cousin Francis; then he flung away his dinner-napkin and stepped out into the hall, closing the door sharply behind him.

"Is Miss Vanhomrigh sick?" he asked of his visitor, without ceremony.

"Dying," replied Francis shortly. His eyes were worn and red with watching and secret tears, and his whole face looked older by several years than it had done in the autumn.

"Impossible!" cried Swift, turning pale. "Good God, sir, there must be some hope."

"None at all. 'Tis a question of a few hours," returned Francis. "She is urgent to see you. I think she is wandering, but I could not forbear promising to bring you."

Swift was deeply affected.

"This is terrible," he said. "Poor, poor Missessy! Poor dear child! 'Tis so sudden I cannot feel it true."

"There is not a moment to lose," said Francis. "If you mean to come, order your best horse out at once. Mine is having a mash, and will go back as fast as he came."

The Dean hastily gave the order. He would not return to the dining-room lest his agitation should be visible, but rushed upstairs to change his gown for a riding-dress, while Francis went out to fetch his horse from the stables of a neighbouring inn. In an incredibly short space of time they were crossing the bridge at a sharp trot, side by side. The Dean would have liked to inquire further concerning Essie's condition, but he had an unaccountable feeling of embarrassment in addressing Francis. Besides, the noise of the streets, which on this fine moonlight evening were full of traffic, seemed an unfitting accompaniment to conversation so solemn and distressing as theirs must needs be. So he wrapped himself in reflections that every moment became more poignant. They took the way by Phœnix Park, and Francis being a little ahead when they arrived, had no sooner touched the turf than he let his horse break into a gallop. The Dean's big horse, which though naturally not so fast was fresher, started eagerly in pursuit, and the two dark shapes flew on neck and neck across the pale open stretches of the park, till the ground dipped and they were blotted out in the dark shadows of some thorn-trees. When they regained the road they breathed their horses, and the Dean almost timidly adressed his companion.

"Is not this sickness, sir, very sudden?"

"No, sir," replied Francis. "This violent fever is

sudden, but she has been sick ever since the autumn, and has taken no manner of care of her health till very lately. I endeavoured to made her more careful of herself while I was with her, but to no purpose."

"Ah, poor child!" cried the Dean, no longer able to restrain his tears. "She was used to have such good health; no doubt she could not believe she was ill."

"No, sir, that was not it!" returned Francis. "But she was indifferent whether she was ill or well, or lived or died. Why do you weep, Mr. Dean? Was not you just as indifferent? I never heard that you made the least inquiry after her."

"Mr. Mordaunt," replied Swift, with a kind of dignified humility, "you have the right to reproach me, for you have been a true friend to poor Missessy, and I have not. I have been tender when I should have been severe, and hard when indulgence would have better become me. But indeed, Mr. Mordaunt, it has been more for her sake and another's than my own, that I have refrained from a reconciliation with her. You know, perhaps, we quarrelled."

"I know you broke her heart," cried Francis, "if you call that quarrelling. You have killed her, Dr. Swift, as certainly as though you had put a bullet in her."

As he had ridden silent at his companion's side, his former relations to Esther had presented themselves to Swift in a new light. This was partly owing to the shock of this summons to her death-bed, and partly because he had considered the subject so little during the last eight months that the mist of old habit and sentiment, which had once obscured it to the eyes of his judgment, had had time to clear away. He condemned himself, but this last condemnation was more than his reason or his feelings could accept.

"Sir," he said, "you are a young man, and grief and resentment lead you too far. I fear 'tis true that Miss Vanhomrigh was more affected by the unhappy difference between us than I at all guessed; but a broken heart was never yet found out of a play or a

romance. Believe me, poor Essie will live if she has no other disease than that."

"She has," replied Francis, "and yet I confidently believe that were it not for you, we that love her should now see her as well and strong as ever she was in England. I cannot, sir, affect a desire to spare you grief and pain. You spared her none. I tell you that when I left her at Christmas she was utterly reckless of her health, and seemed to desire death if she could be said to desire anything. She drove me most unwillingly from her side, and I went, hoping that my absence would cause her in some degree to miss me, and that on my return she would consent to come with me as my wife to a country where the air was wholesome for her complaint, and where she might forget her misfortunes. She wrote to me scarcely at all, but her old serving-woman, that was nurse to both of us, wrote me at last as well as she could, poor creature, that can scarce write at all. She told me Essie had altered since the winter was over, and was no longer so dull, but sometimes in a kind of fever which, the old creature thought, made her almost wandering in her mind, though she would never to bed for it. And just as I was starting to go, Essie herself wrote me to come, and how she was ill, but would be married as soon as I pleased and go to America, and hoped so to get her health again. And I was fool enough to think all going very well."

He was silent.

"How long since was it that you returned?" asked Swift.

"About a month. I never thought to have found her so ill. I thought there could be nothing worse than her indifference to her life, but yet there was. For somehow—whether 'twas she had hurried down the valley of the shadow with an unnatural speed for one of her age and strength, or whether 'twas the spring coming, I know not, but somehow she had grown afeared of death. And 'twas too late, for she was very sick, though still walking about when I returned. She'd say to me: 'I don't want to die,

Frank. I thought I did, but now I'm so sick I'm afeared on't. Don't let me die. Take me to America, where you think I shall get well.' But I durstn't, for she was not strong enough to bear the voyage. And then this fever came. That's but a few days since."

"Poor dear Essie!" cried Swift in a trembling voice. "She would weep if she heard of a stranger that died young, and say what a dreadful thing it was to be cut off in the prime. She seemed so full of life, I cannot yet believe there's no hope."

"You will presently then see there's no room for it," returned Francis. "There is no room now for anything but repentance. And what can that avail?"

"Young man," returned Swift, "with God I trust it may, though not with you. He knows my blindness, and how much I have erred through that—how much through wilful sin."

"Were you to repent for a hundred years, and lash yourself worse than an enthusiast monk," said Francis, "'twould not recall Essie to life, nor give me back —— Well, no matter."

"Mr. Mordaunt," returned Swift solemnly, "if I could at this moment offer my miserable life in exchange for hers, 'tis inexpressible how gladly I would do it."

"There's but one thing more that either you or I can do for her," said Francis, "and that is to be with her before she dies."

They spurred their horses and trotted along the road by the river. The slow tears coursed each other down Swift's cheeks as he rode, and he prayed long and earnestly that God would of His mercy spare the life of Esther Vanhomrigh, or if that might not be, that He would graciously receive her spirit, remembering her many virtues, and blotting out her sins from His book, or adding them to the sum of those for which the erring man now supplicating Him must one day answer.

As they went on, the few and twinkling lights disappeared from the roadside cottages. The full white moon was high in the cloudless deep of heaven, and the sounds of the warm summer night were all about

their path; the splash of leaping fish, the sleepy chirrup of birds disturbed by some night-wandering creature; the song of the reed-warbler, the persistent chirring of the night-jar, and the occasional hoot of an owl, far off on some ancestral tree. It was such an exquisite May night, full of the mystery and beauty of moonlight and the scent of hawthorn, as makes the earth an Eden in which none but lovers should walk —happy lovers or young poets, whose large eyes, so blind in the daylight world of men, can see God walking in the Garden. Somewhere, no doubt, in this wide beautiful world of night, those ever new creations were looking round with wonder and delight on their inheritance, but here on the banks of the Liffey there was none to enter into it. The weary labourers slept in their closed cottages, and nothing human was stirring except these two men, hurrying along the white road with no wish but to put it behind them as quickly as possible; men united by a common sorrow, but divided by bitter feelings of resentment and remorse.

Meantime at Cellbridge old Ann was anxiously awaiting the return of Master Francis. She was grown really old now, and though still strong enough in body to perform the functions of a nurse, she was nervous and unable to control her invalid. Esther had always refused to keep her bed. She sat propped up in a large chair by the fire. All day she had been breathing with difficulty, but in the evening she had seemed better and fallen into an uneasy slumber. Presently she woke, but her manner was so strange that though she said little, Ann feared she was wandering in her mind. She bade the old woman bring out and spread before her certain dresses lying by in a wardrobe; fine clothes for which she had found little use during the past few years. One by one she looked at them all, and had them put away again, till at last a *négligée* of white silk brocade was unfolded from its wrappings of paper.

"There, there!" she cried, "I care nothing for the mode. I will have it white. Dress me in that."

"Alas, my pretty dear miss," returned the old nurse, "the dead may wear naught but woollen."

Esther smiled.

"Come hither, Ann," she said, and took the nurse's hand when she was come close up to her. "You mistake. 'Tis no wonder you should, but 'tis all a mistake. I am not in a decline, as poor Moll was. Something dreadful came, I cannot remember what, but it touched my heart and turned it into a stone." And she laid Ann's hand on her thin bosom. "'Tis a fearful pain—no, 'tis worse than pain, to walk about with a great stone in your bosom, and no doubt I must have died of it if he had not come. But he did come while I slept, and touched my heart himself. You can feel now 'tis quite warm and beats again. I am well this morning and, Ann, I am going to be married. My mamma will be pleased, won't she?"

"Oh, my poor lamb!" cried the old woman. "Pray recollect yourself and think of your latter end."

Esther laughed feebly.

"Thou old infidel! Do I not look well? Oh, sure I must! Make haste now to dress my hair, for I dare not be late. He was ever exact."

She sat bolt upright in her chair, and with trembling fingers the old woman began to comb and pin up her thick hair.

"Why, Ann, what are you doing?" asked Esther impatiently. "Where are my curls?"

It was years since the mode of wearing a few curls loose on the neck had gone out, and she had long abandoned it. Ann, obedient to her fancy, arranged her fair curls in the old way. Then with extraordinary strength she rose, and pulling off her wrapper, began to put on the white silk *négligée*. Old Ann, seeing her not to be dissuaded, helped her on with it, and put more wraps round her. But she walked to the window letting them trail off her as she went. Drawing aside the curtain, "Sunshine!" she said, smiling to herself, as she looked out on the moonlight; "'tis well, very well."

And she returned smiling to her chair, as though she had pleasant thoughts. Indeed, her wandering fancy had conjured up again the scene on the steps of the London church, on that May morning ten years ago.

"I must have 'em," she cried, "a great posy of 'em. 'Twill be better than pearls for my wedding, for they do say pearls mean tears. And I won't have any more tears, no, nor so much as think of them, for I have shed such a many—— Ah! no one would believe!—— Ann, call Thomas, and bid him bring me a fine posy of the blue forget-me-nots from the meadow by the river. There's plenty of 'em there, all growing together. He can't miss seeing them."

"God ha' mercy on you, Miss Essie, my dear!" ejaculated the old woman trembling. "Pray, pray to Him to give you back your senses before you go."

"If you'll not call him, I must myself," returned Esther pettishly, and rose to her feet, crying out feebly, "Thomas! Thomas!"

Ann would have replaced her in her chair, but could not, and the scant tears of age began to gather in her dim eyes. While she was still attempting to calm and restrain her nursling, she heard the creaking tread of men in riding boots coming up the stairs as softly as they might. She desisted from her attempts as Francis, opening the door, stood on one side and let the Dean pass before him.

Swift, lividly pale, but making a great effort to restrain his emotion, advanced two steps into the room and paused. He had expected to see a figure stretched upon the bed, perhaps unconscious; perhaps alive enough to whisper reproach or forgiveness. He saw Esther fully dressed, upright, though leaning with one hand on the foot of the bed. She was fearfully changed since he had seen her last. Her cheeks were hollow; her neck and arms, a few months ago so round and white, were wasted and bloodless. He was shocked at her appearance, yet it was by no means so deathlike as it had been earlier in the day; for her eyes glittered with an unnatural brightness, and there was a feverish colour in her cheeks. As soon as she saw him she stepped up to him with surprising firmness, and putting her two hands on his shoulders, said, looking at him tenderly—

"So you are come, Cadenus."

"Yes, yes, I came immediately, Missessy," he

answered, pulling down one of her hands and holding it in his own.

"I knew you would be punctual to your time," she returned. "I am glad the morning is so fair. Do you remember what the old woman said? 'Happy the bride the sun shines on'!"

"Get her back, and let me close this door," said Francis.

"No, no, let us go out," said Esther. "They all talk as though I were sick, but I am quite cured, am I not, Cadenus? You know how."

"I trust in God it may be so," answered Swift, choking with tears and bowing his face upon her hand.

"Yes, I am very well. Let us make haste, for the people are all waiting to see. Why should we hide? I want them all to see the happiest, proudest woman in the world. Your bride—O Heavens, Cadenus!—your wife."

And flinging her arms round his neck she buried her head in his bosom.

"O God," he groaned, "O God!"

Then, controlling his anguish by a great effort, he spoke gently and firmly in her ear.

"Essie, I implore you in the name of our Saviour to put away these deceitful fancies, and remember what has passed and who and where we are."

She raised her head and stood before him, looking in his face with an anxious bewildered gaze.

"Essie," he went on with clasped hands and the tears running down his cheeks, "I have come hither to acknowledge my fault and earnestly beg your forgiveness."

As he spoke, the light of reason slowly dawned in her eyes, and the brilliancy of fever began to fade. She made a step or two backward and caught hold of the bedpost with one hand.

"Hesskin," he said, "I have been a poor friend to you."

She fixed her eyes on him with an intent look of full recognition, and leaned back against the bed.

Francis closed the door gently. Esther did not speak, but the look which she had fixed upon Swift grew to be a look of horror and anguish.

"Forgive me," he tried to say, covering his face with his hand.

She did not move, except that he thought he saw her stagger and stepped forward to catch hold of her. She audibly gasped, and made a movement as though to repel his hands. Then again she looked on him with that dreadful gaze. It seemed to him an eternity that he stood with bowed head beneath it, but it was really but a few seconds. Then she fell backwards on the bed, and before a hand could be stretched to save her, rolled heavily on to the floor. So quickly they knew not how it was done, Swift and Francis lifted her back on to the bed, and each peered in her face, oblivious of the other. The stamp of death was set upon it. Old Ann put a feather into Francis' hand, and he held it to his cousin's mouth, but neither of the two men eagerly bending over her could be certain whether or no she yet breathed. Surely, surely she must. Unconsciously their hands met upon her bosom, and beneath those two hands, touching each other now for the last time, the stormy heart of Esther Vanhomrigh heaved once and was for ever still.

THE END.

571

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022839378